



# HEALTH TOPIC OF THE WEEK

## 7/11: Blood Pressure

### What Is High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure refers to a serious medical problem that can cause heart failure, vision impairment, stroke, kidney disease and sexual dysfunction. The primary way that high blood pressure causes harm is by increasing the workload of the heart and blood vessels — making them work harder and less efficiently. Over time, the force and friction of high blood pressure damages the delicate tissues inside the arteries. In turn, LDL (bad) cholesterol forms plaque along tiny tears in the artery walls, signifying the start of atherosclerosis.



### Why Is High Blood Pressure Often Called A Stealth Condition?

A stealth condition is insidious. High blood pressure generally has no warning signs or symptoms. Approximately 47% of adult Americans have high blood pressure and sadly, many people don't realize they have it.



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## What Is The Official Definition Of High Blood Pressure?

You have high blood pressure if you have consistent readings of 130/80 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) or higher. High blood pressure, also called hypertension, injures blood vessels, causing them to thicken and stiffen. Left untreated, high blood pressure eventually damages the heart, brain, and kidneys. That's why every health care visit should include a blood pressure check.



Keep a record of your readings. They can fluctuate due to a range of factors, including exertion and stress. If your readings start trending toward the high range or you've already been diagnosed with high blood pressure, consider buying a device for home-based checks.

## How Do Home Blood Pressure Readings Compare To Office Readings?

Heart attacks, strokes, and other serious health problems correlate more closely with home blood pressure than office blood pressure readings. Why is that? Blood pressure at home better represents what your heart and brain experience most of the time rather than blood pressure taken during the 15 to 20 minutes you're in a doctor's office.

## Choosing A Home Blood Pressure Monitor

Skip devices with a wrist cuff or a fingertip sensor. They're not as reliable as those with an upper arm cuff. Be sure to choose the correct cuff size. The inflatable part should completely cover at least 80% of your bare arm. A too-small cuff can give a reading that's falsely high. Ask your physician if you're not sure if you should get a large or extra-large cuff.



## At The Doctor's Office

If you've never had your blood pressure checked in both arms sequentially, ask to have this done at your next health care appointment. If the reading from one arm is higher, that side should be the one upon which to base any treatment and to check in the future.

Bring your home monitor to your next medical appointment to compare its readout with the measurement taken in the doctor's office. If the readings vary by less than 10%, consider your home monitor validated.



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## General Advice

Many factors can slightly elevate blood pressure — for example, drinking a lot of coffee, having a full bladder, or crossing your legs. Caffeine is a stimulant that raises the heart rate and blood pressure as well. A full bladder and crossed legs can both reduce blood flow returning to your heart. Your body's natural response to this is to raise your blood pressure to make sure your kidneys and brain are getting enough blood.



Tips to get an accurate blood pressure reading at home:

- Avoid caffeine, tobacco, and exercise for at least 30 minutes beforehand.
- Empty your bladder.
- Sit with your feet flat on the floor.
- Place the cuff on your bare arm (not over clothing) with the bottom edge about a finger's width above the crook of your elbow.
- Support your forearm by resting it on a table, with your elbow positioned roughly at heart height.
- Sit quietly without talking (or doing anything else such as reading, watching TV, or doing a crossword puzzle) during the measurement.



Current guidelines suggest that people wait one minute, retake the reading, and then average the two numbers. Follow your doctor's advice about when and how often to check your blood pressure at home.



To watch a video from the American Heart Association demonstrating the correct technique, go online to [https://targetbp.org/tools\\_downloads/self-measured-blood-pressure-video](https://targetbp.org/tools_downloads/self-measured-blood-pressure-video).

**Concerned about your blood pressure? Elite Personal Fitness and Training Solutions offers effective ways to address hypertension through diet and exercise.**



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