

Why am I being asked to measure my blood pressure at home?

Home monitoring is very useful for a number of reasons:

- To give a more accurate picture of what your blood pressure is like as you go about your daily life
- To see if your blood pressure is higher in the clinic than it is at home
- To allow you to see how your treatment is working for you
- To alert your GP to unexpected changes in your readings, helping them to adjust your medications if required
- To help pick out 'white coat effect' which can make your blood pressure higher than usual when it is taken in the clinic

Is measuring blood pressure at home the right thing for you?

Measuring blood pressure at home can be very useful and is now an important part of managing high blood pressure, but it is not for everyone. Some people become more anxious when they start measuring at home and end up taking readings far too often.

If you feel anxious you can discuss this with your doctor or nurse first. Before you decide to try measuring your blood pressure at home, ask yourself: is this going to make me feel more relaxed or more worried?

What do I need to do?

You will be asked to take two BP readings twice daily (morning and evening) for 7 days and drop them into or send them by email into your GP Practice. Your GP will review your average result and give you advice on any further readings or action if needed.

CHECKING YOUR

BLOOD PRESSURE AT HOME



Do your reading before eating, taking medication or vigorous exercise. Don't drink caffeine or smoke for 30 minutes before your reading.

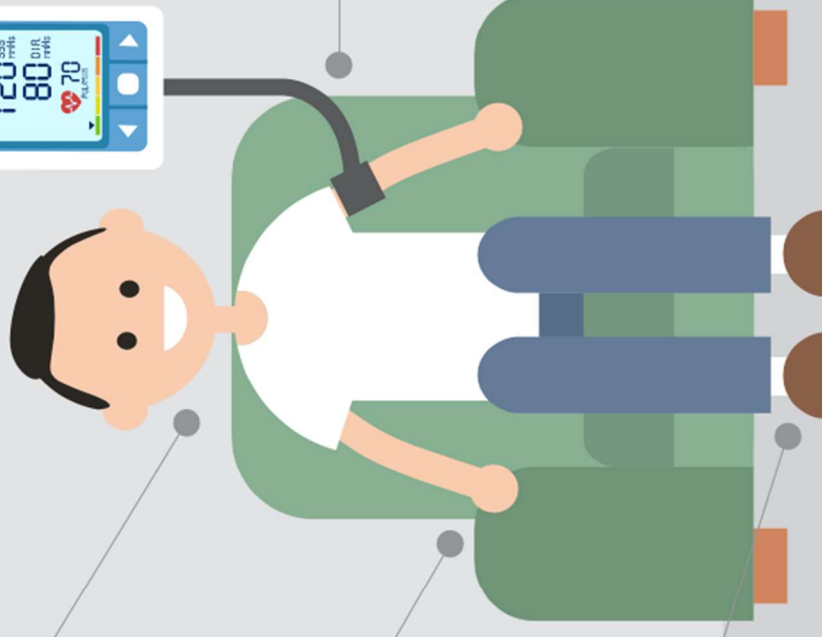
Don't measure your BP if you don't feel comfortable or you are stressed or in pain. Sit quietly for 5 minutes before taking your reading.

Sit with both feet flat on the ground, with the top half of your arm bare and your back and arm supported.

It is important that you only use upper arm, validated machines (further information below). Finger and / or wrist BP devices are not recommended.

Use a cuff that fits the top half of your arm properly. Sit in a relaxed position with the cuff at the heart level.

Take your measurements for a minimum of 4 days in a row at around the same time in the morning and evening. Each time you measure your BP, take two measurements, 1 minute apart.



This graphic has been adapted from a Heart Foundation (Aus) resource

How to measure your own blood pressure

Many things can make your blood pressure rise for a short time. Before you take your reading:

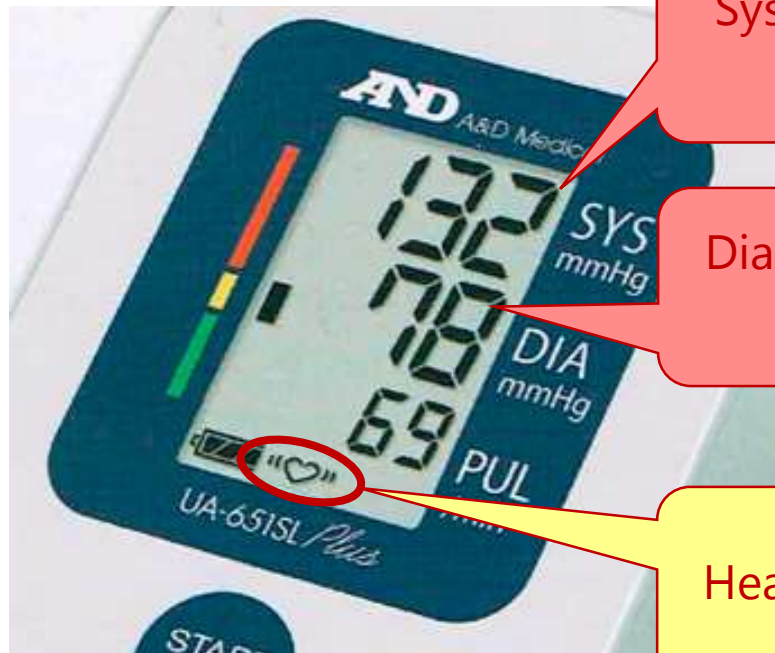
- Make sure that you do not need the toilet, and that you have not just eaten a big meal.
- Do not measure your BP within 30 minutes of drinking caffeine or smoking, or immediately after exercise or drinking alcohol.
- add not to measure BP immediately after physical activity/exercising Make sure you are relaxed and comfortable. If you are anxious or uncomfortable, this will make your blood pressure rise temporarily
- Wear loose fitting clothing like a short-sleeved t-shirt so you can push your sleeve up comfortably
- Always use the same arm for readings as each arm will give you a slightly different reading
- Before you take your readings, rest for a few minutes. You should be sitting down in a quiet place with your arm resting on a firm surface, palm facing upwards and feet flat on the floor
- Make sure your arm is supported and the BP cuff around your arm is at the same level as your heart

Taking your reading

- Put the cuff on following the instructions that come with your monitor
- When you are taking your reading, keep still and silent. Moving and talking can affect your reading.
- Take two readings about two minutes apart
- Record the two readings - **Do not round your measurement up or down, just write down the number that comes up on the monitor**

Your blood pressure reading

Blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg). It is written like this: 140/90mmHg which is said "140 over 90". The first and highest number shows 'systolic' pressure when your heart beats and pushes the blood around your body. The second lower number shows the 'diastolic' pressure when your heart relaxes and refills with blood.



Irregular heart rate alert (♡)

The monitor will show this heart symbol (♡) as an alert if it detects your heart rate is abnormally fast or irregular. This can be an important early warning sign of heart problems so should not be ignored but can also be a sign of other normal conditions.

<https://www.heartrhythmalliance.org/aa/uk/know-your-pulse>

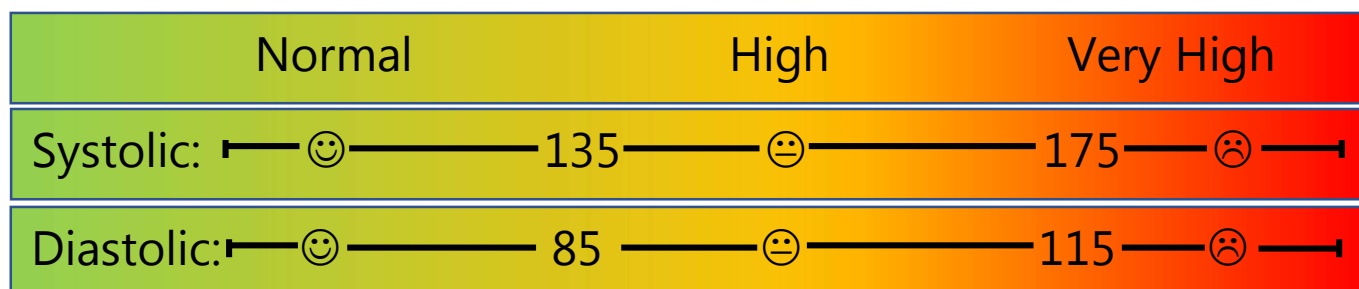
If you feel well and have no symptoms you should contact your GP as soon as possible for more checks. Make sure this is noted on your recording form.

If you have noticed a recent sudden increase in your heart rate and are feeling dizzy, faint or having palpitations (a feeling of being aware of your heartbeat, or that your heart is pounding or beating irregularly), you should go to A&E.

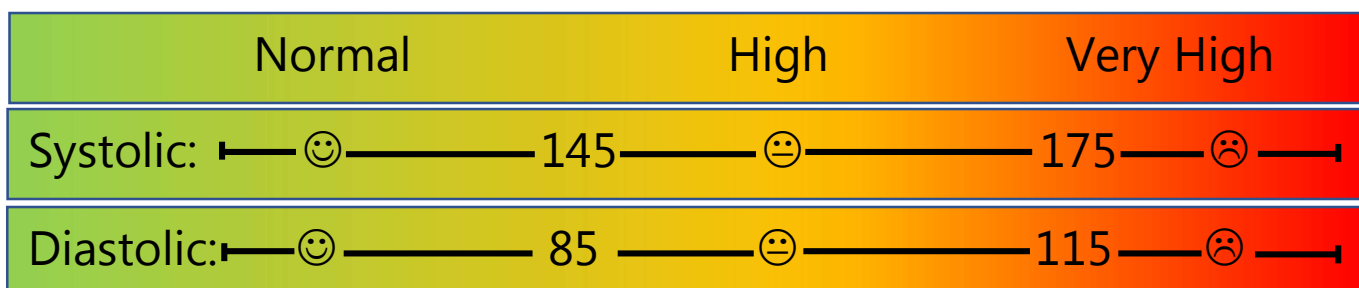
What do your blood pressure results mean – a general guide

Locate your average readings along the line.

Aged under 80 years - average blood pressure readings



Aged 80 years or over - average blood pressure readings



Remember

Do not be alarmed if you get an unexpected high value for either reading. A single blood pressure reading is not representative of your average resting blood pressure. Measure your blood pressure again at another time, but if you find that it continues to be high, contact your doctor or nurse.

What happens next?

Please send your results back to your GP.

- A paper copy delivered or posted to your GP Practice
- Email (if available)

Your GP will review your average result and give you advice on any further readings or action if needed.

What are the risk factors?

About 1 in 3 adults in Somerset has high blood pressure so it is fairly common.

Blood pressure tends to creep up as we get older. Males tend to have higher blood pressure than females. Some ethnic groups have an increased risk of high blood pressure.

The good news is that a number of lifestyle factors can also increase blood pressure and small changes in these can help bring your blood pressure down.

Medication

Some people will need to take medication prescribed by their doctor to lower their blood pressure. Today's blood pressure tablets are very effective and can reduce your risk of stroke and heart attack.

For more information or advice

Visit our Healthy Somerset website for support on lifestyle change information on local services and useful apps

www.HealthySomerset.co.uk/heart



WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE AND WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Blood pressure is the pressure of blood in your arteries. If it is too high over a period of time and is not treated you will be more at risk of having a stroke or heart attack.

High blood pressure usually has no symptoms which is why many people don't know they have it. The only way to find out is to have regular checks and remember the numbers in the same way as your height and weight.

As well as increasing your risk of having a stroke or heart attack, high blood pressure is also a risk factor for kidney disease, dementia and other illnesses.

If you have a raised blood pressure reading you should not ignore it. High blood pressure is a serious condition but it can be successfully treated.

WHAT CAUSES HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

Your lifestyle can affect your blood pressure. For most people there is no definite cause yet some things make it more likely:

- A family history of high blood pressure
- You are of Afro-Caribbean descent
- You are of South Asian descent
- Your age – blood pressure tends to go up as we get older

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS MEAN?

When you have your blood pressure measured it is written like this: 140/90mmHg, which is said "140 over 90". The first number occurs when your heart beats and pushes blood around your body. The second occurs when your heart relaxes and fills with blood.

WHAT SHOULD MY BLOOD PRESSURE BE?

A healthy blood pressure is 120/80 or less. You should aim to get your blood pressure to this level. 140/90 is the level used to diagnose high blood pressure, whatever your age. If your blood pressure is consistently raised at this level or above, it will need to be lowered.

NEED ADVICE?

If you have a question or concern about your blood pressure, advice can be provided by:

Blood Pressure UK 020 7882 6255

www.bloodpressureuk.org
www.nhs.uk

Your community pharmacy will also be able to help.

A FEW SIMPLE LIFESTYLE CHANGES CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Eat more fruit and vegetables

These are the best source of potassium in the diet, which helps to lower blood pressure. Try to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Don't forget that frozen, canned and dried varieties count too.

Eat less salt

An adult should eat less than 6g of salt a day. 75% of the salt we eat is "hidden" in our foods - make sure you check food labels for salt content and don't add it to your food.

Medication

Some people will also need to take medication prescribed by their doctor to lower their blood pressure. Today's blood pressure tablets are very effective and can reduce your risk of stroke and heart attack.

Drink alcohol in moderation

Men and women are advised not to drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week on a regular basis and to spread this over three or more days.

Lose weight if you need to

If you lose the excess weight you will probably find that your blood pressure reduces.

Be active

Aim for half an hour of exercise on five days of the week. The exercise needs to make you breathe faster and warm you up.

Stop smoking

To reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke.