



PULSE CHECK

Your Cardiovascular Consult

Home Blood Pressure Monitoring

The American Heart Association recommends that patients with hypertension regularly monitor their blood pressure (BP) at home. Regular BP monitoring presents a number of important benefits:

- Greater patient involvement. Home blood pressure monitoring (HBPM) encourages patients to become more proactive in managing his or her own health. This responsibility may motivate the patient to control their BP with a healthier diet, an increase in physical activity and closer adherence to medication use
- More accurate readings. Frequent and regular BP monitoring results in a more precise understanding of the patient's typical BP
- Close tracking of medication effectiveness. HBPM provides vital information about medications' effectiveness in treating the patient's condition(s)
- Early hypertension diagnosis. For patients with pre-hypertension or other conditions that could contribute to hypertension such as diabetes, HBPM could help in diagnosing hypertension earlier
- Uncovering white coat hypertension. The anxiety associated with being at the doctor's office causes otherwise normal BP to rise. Monitoring blood pressure at home can help determine if raised BP is associated primarily with office visits or if it is true hypertension

Monitoring Guidelines

Patients should be given guidelines to help them perform an accurate blood pressure check:

- First, encourage the patient to bring his or her monitor to your office so that a comparison with your office monitor can be done. Take this time to make sure the patient is using the monitor properly. A helpful video that walks patients through self-monitoring is available on the American Heart Association website
- Patients should measure their BP twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening - always at about the same time. BP is at its highest first thing in the morning, so if possible patients should wait an hour after waking to take the first reading
- The patient should take two or three readings during a single session, about one minute apart, and record all results
- Readings should be taken when the patient has been sitting quietly for 5 minutes, with the arm supported on a flat surface so that the upper arm is supported at the level of the heart. The patient's legs and ankles should be uncrossed and his or her back supported
- Patients should not use caffeine, alcohol or tobacco products 30 minutes prior to measuring their BP
- The cuff should be wrapped around the upper part of the left arm; arm should be bare. The cuff should fit snugly, but with enough space to slip a fingertip under the cuff. The bottom edge of the cuff should be 1 inch above the elbow

Which Monitors Are The Best?

Patients should use only a validated home blood pressure monitor. An up-to-date list of validated monitors is available at www.dableducational.org.

How Often Should Patients Check Their BP?

If a patient's blood pressure is well controlled, checking at home just weekly (once in the morning and once at night one day a week) will suffice. If the patient is new to monitoring blood pressure at home, if there are recent changes in his or her medication, or if the patient has other health problems such as diabetes, checking 2 to 3 times weekly is practical.

When To Be Concerned

Patients should be directed to contact you if they have unusual or persistent increases in blood pressure. They should also contact you if an increase in BP is experienced along with a severe headache, chest pain, numbness or tingling in the face or limbs.

Contraindications

HBPM is contraindicated for patients with atrial fibrillation or other arrhythmias.

In Summary

Given the accumulated evidence about the value of HBPM, the physicians of Appleton Cardiology Associates believe that HBPM should be part of routine management of hypertensive patients, especially those with diabetes, coronary heart disease, chronic kidney disease, suspected prescription non-adherence, or a substantial white-coat effect.