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How to Take Blood Pressure Correctly

My View: Robert DiBianco, M.D., FACC

Why make an effort to take BP carefully?

1. To reduce wide fluctuations in BP that are often impossible to interpret
2. To avoid over-treatment and possible drug-related side effects.
3. To treat BP appropriately and best lower the risk of heart attack and stroke; since, just a 20 point increase in systolic BP (top number) DOUBLES all vascular risks (includes risk of heart attack, stroke, hospitalization for angina or heart failure, and peripheral artery disease).

How to do it?

- Don't even start to take your BP if you're stressed, upset, in any pain, have just exercised smoked, or had a big meal. The BP will not be interpretable and likely inappropriately high.
- Find a quiet place. Be sure the room temperature is comfortable and pleasant. A room that is too cold – Raises BP. A room that is too warm – Lowers BP.
- Sit down in a comfortable chair: -Your back should supported by back of the chair
-Your feet should rest on the floor.
- Take your BP at various times, 3-4 times weekly. Accuracy and not frequency is important.
- Use a totally automatic arm cuff (One with no bulb to squeeze or earpiece to listen with.)
- Importantly, always be sure to be relaxed whenever you take it.
- Be sure your arm is free, not wrapped by tight clothes rolled up above the elbow.
- Place the BP cuff around the arm just above the elbow, snug, not tight and not over clothing.
- Let your arm lie on an armrest or table or at your side, if that is the most comfortable.
- Now, relax for 5 minutes and then take your BP. Make a mental note of the numbers but don't record these just yet; since, this first BP number is often falsely high.
- Release the cuff so it is not tight on your arm.
- Wait 5 minutes and take BP again.
If this BP is about the same as the first, record the average –This is your BP! Do no more.
If this BP is 5-10 units lower or higher than the first, you'll need to sit for at least another 5 minutes and check the BP again.
- Please record only BP's that are reproducible, that is within 5-10 mmHg of each other
- Remember, a single BP number, either high or low has little significance, it's the usual BP or average that allows us to change treatment

Goals for BP	Best (Normal)	Acceptable	Abnormal
SYSTOLIC (Top Number)	100 - 120	Under 130	140 or higher
DIASTOLIC (Bottom number)	60 - 80	Under 85	90 or higher

What should I pay attention to?

Systolic BP: If you're older than 55, all you probably need to follow is the Systolic BP (Top Number Only). This is the highest pressure in artery during each beat. It goes up with age and is most predictive of heart attack and stroke. The Diastolic BP goes down after age 55 in most of us so it becomes less helpful to follow. Younger patients may want to follow both BP numbers.

LOW BP: defined as 100 systolic or less is NOT A PROBLEM, IF YOU FEEL FINE, sitting, standing and doing your daily activities. Low BP is generally a sign of good health, and NOT a concern.

Additional Information: available at www.MedlinePlus.gov - website created for patient information by US Dept Health and Human Services, National Library of Medicine, American College of Physicians and National Institutes of Health.