



Is Your Home Blood Pressure Monitor Reliable?

Betty Chaffee/ May 15, 2022/ [Medication Management](#)/ [6 comments](#)

Nearly half of adults in the United States have high blood pressure. Many monitor their blood pressure at home. If you use a home blood pressure (HBP) monitor, you're already doing a great job taking care of your health. But are you sure your monitor is giving you reliable results? It's important to care for your monitor, too. They don't last forever. Inaccurate results can cause you to worry needlessly, or keep you feeling content when you should be concerned. I was recently reminded of this by a patient (thank you!). So let's talk about how to make sure you're getting reliable results from your HBP monitor.

Before we go there, though, a quick but important point. If you have high blood pressure and you're not checking it in between doctor visits, talk with your doctor. Many experts believe that HBP monitoring is an important part of treating high blood pressure.

Home Blood Pressure Monitors

There are lots of HBP monitors to choose from And many are both easy to



use *and* affordable. Most are [validated for accuracy and precision](#) prior to marketing. If you're thinking of purchasing one soon, be sure to purchase a monitor with



a cuff that goes around your upper arm rather than one that goes around your wrist. The results are much more accurate.

And remember, the cuff size matters. Using too large or small a cuff can result in inaccurate readings. The size is based on your arm measurement. Most BP cuffs have the size printed right on the cuff, so it's pretty easy to find. Many HBP monitors offer more than one size cuff, either with the original purchase or as an accessory. Keep in mind, too, that your arm size might change over the years, so check the cuff size periodically. Have you been trying to lose weight? Your arm might get smaller. Trying to lose but gaining instead? Your arm might get larger. Take a look at the cuff you're using to be sure it's the right size for you.



As soon as possible after you purchase it, check the monitor for [accuracy](#). Take it to your pharmacy or doctor's office. First, use your monitor to measure your blood pressure, then have them use their equipment to do the same. You may need to take more than one reading with each set of equipment at 30 second intervals to be



sure results are comparable. This procedure allows your healthcare professional to 1) make sure you're using your equipment correctly and 2) assess the accuracy of your monitor's results. Differences of a few points are typical and okay, but if the numbers are quite different, or if your monitor gives inconsistent results, you may need to contact the manufacturer.

HBP Monitor Maintenance

Home monitors aren't expected to last a lifetime. You'll find that the cuff itself may be only have a 1-year warranty, the monitor 2 or 3 years. Some may be more than that, but none are expected to remain accurate for decades.

Of course, be sure to replace batteries when they're low, But also, take your monitor to your pharmacy or your doctor's office annually to check its accuracy. As long as it's measuring your BP reliably, there's no need to replace it. But if you find the results are inconsistent from day to day, or if they're not reasonably close to professional equipment, it's time to purchase a new one.

When is blood pressure considered high?

You may have heard over the past five years or so that high blood pressure is diagnosed earlier than it used to be. Doctors used to diagnose high blood pressure only when it reached 140 (systolic) over 90 (diastolic) or higher. New [guidelines in 2017](#) changed all that. Now, "normal" blood pressure is defined as 120/80 or below, 120-129/80 is "elevated", and anything over 130 (systolic) OR 80 (diastolic) is considered "high".

There's some thought that when home blood pressure results are used rather than office measurements, the definition of high blood pressure can be a little higher. [Newer international guidelines](#) suggest using a threshold of 135/85 instead of 130/80 when home results are used. But it's important to remember that high blood pressure is only one of many risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Other risk factors, like smoking, diabetes, and high cholesterol need to be considered, too. So if you're at risk of heart disease or stroke for other reasons, your doctor may want to begin treatment for high blood pressure at the lower threshold.

In short, if you're concerned you may have high blood pressure, talk with your doctor. You might find that given the differing guidelines as well as your health history, your doctor isn't all that concerned. But be sure to talk about next steps. What blood pressure measurement *should* cause concern? Do you need to continue monitoring your blood pressure at home? How often should you report your results?

Care for your blood pressure monitor so it can help you care for yourself!

If you have any questions about how to confirm the accuracy of your HBP monitor, please write a comment below or [contact us](#) directly at **BetterMyMeds**. We love hearing from you!



Betty Chaffee, PharmD, is owner and sole proprietor of BetterMyMeds, a Medication Management service devoted to helping people get the maximum benefit from their medications.

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