

Blood Pressure Monitors - Tips on How to Use Them Correctly

Most pharmacies and medical supply stores sites have home blood pressure monitors in two model types, manual or digital. All monitors have the same basic components, an inflatable cuff or strap, a gauge for readouts and sometimes a stethoscope, depending on the model. The cuff consists of an inner layer made of rubber that fills with air and squeezes your arm. This cuff's outer layer is generally made of nylon and has a fastener to hold it in place. The gauges on monitors are either digital or aneroid. The aneroid monitors have a gauge with a dial on it that points at a number related to your blood pressure. A manual blood pressure monitor consists of a stethoscope and an inflatable arm cuff connected by a rubber tube to a gauge that records the pressure. To use these cuff, you inflate the cuff that goes around your arm by pumping a bulb at one end of the tube. You listen for certain benchmark arterial blood sounds your blood makes as it flows through the brachial artery in the crook of your elbow and count your own heart rate. However, without proper training, it is difficult to interpret those sounds. Digital blood pressure cuffs usually have a built-in sensor that records the information for you. A digital monitor consists of a cuff and a gauge that records the pressure. These devices automatically calculate heart rate and measure your blood pressure. Some even give you an error message if you are not wearing the cuff properly. Digital monitors also deflate automatically. Although you can get a digital cuff for your finger or wrist, the one that fits on the upper arm is slightly more accurate. No matter what type of home blood pressure monitor you choose, proper use requires some practice and training. Take the device to your doctor or nurse or find a class at your local medical facility and learn how to use the monitor accurately and keep it calibrated. Here are some tips for using a monitor: Have your doctor or nurse observe how you use the device so that he or she can see if you are doing it properly. Take your blood pressure at consistent times, such as in the morning and in the evening. Use the same arm whenever you take your blood pressure. Note that many digital monitors are meant for use only on the left arm. Don't measure your blood pressure immediately after you wake in the morning. Wait an hour or so. If you exercise after waking, take your blood pressure before exercising. Avoid food, caffeine, tobacco and alcohol for thirty minutes before taking a measurement. Go to the restroom first. A full bladder can increase blood pressure slightly. Sit quietly for three to five minutes before a measurement. Sit in a comfortable position with legs and ankles uncrossed and your back supported. Rest your arm, raised to the level of your heart, on a table, desk or chair arm. Don't talk while taking your blood pressure. Place the cuff on bare skin, not over clothing. Take a repeat reading two to three minutes after the first one to check accuracy. If you have a manual monitor, log blood pressure readings or heart rates in a log book. Take the monitor to be calibrated annually. Blood pressure varies throughout the day and is often a little higher in the morning. Contact your doctor if you have any unusual or persistent increases in your pressure. If you experience symptoms such as severe headache, chest pain, numbness or tingling in the face or limbs seek emergency medical treatment immediately. If your blood pressure is well controlled, you may need only check it at home a few days a month but remember that home monitoring is not a substitute for visits to your doctor.

About the Author

Providing convenient, comprehensive pharmacy services in northern and central.

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