

How to Take Your Blood Pressure During Pregnancy and After Childbirth

General Information

Your blood pressure is checked with two numbers. The top number (systolic) shows the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. The bottom number (diastolic) shows the pressure in your arteries when your heart rests.

High blood pressure is also known as hypertension.

What You Need to Know Before You Check Your Blood Pressure

- If you take blood pressure medicine, take your medicine(s) at least 30 minutes before checking your blood pressure.
- Try to avoid eating, smoking, having caffeine, and exercising 30 minutes before you check your blood pressure.

- Try to use the same arm every time you check your blood pressure.
- If you have a dialysis shunt in one of your arms, do not use that arm to check your blood pressure.
- If you have had a mastectomy, do not use the arm on the same side as your surgery.
- If you have had a stroke, do not use the arm on the same side affected by your stroke.

Know What Your Blood Pressure Should Be

See the chart below for general guidelines. Ask your health care provider about what is right for you.

General Blood Pressure Guidelines for Hypertensive Disorders in Pregnancy and After Childbirth

	Top number (systolic)	or	Bottom number (diastolic)	Follow-up instructions
Normal	less than 120	or	less than 80	Tell your health care provider if you are taking blood pressure medicine.
Target	130s to 140s	or	80s to 90s	No follow-up is needed. If you are currently taking blood pressure medicine, keep taking your medicine(s) as directed by your health care provider.
Elevated	150s	or	100s	Rest for 15 minutes. Take your blood pressure again. If it is still elevated, call your health care provider today.
Hypertensive emergency	160 or higher	or	110 or higher	Call your health care provider today.

(over)

When to Check Your Blood Pressure

- Check your blood pressure every day or as directed by your health care provider.
- Check your blood pressure at the same time every day.
- The best time to check your blood pressure is when you are not under stress or in pain.
- Do your reading after sitting for 5 minutes with your feet flat on the floor.

How to Check Your Blood Pressure

You will use a blood pressure machine with either an arm cuff or wrist cuff to check your blood pressure.

- Wear a short-sleeve shirt or remove your shirt. Having the cuff on bare skin will help you get an accurate reading.
- Sit in a chair that has the right support for your back.

How to use the arm cuff

- Set your machine on a table in a quiet place. Be sure to choose a table upon which you can comfortably rest your upper arm at heart level.
- Place the cuff on your upper arm one inch above the bend of your elbow as instructed in the user's guide. Make sure the cuff is not too large or not too small. You should be able to fit one finger under the cuff. If the Velcro® cuff pulls away, you need a bigger cuff.
- Make sure your arm lies flat on the table with the palm of your hand up. Your upper arm should be at heart level. If your upper arm is higher or lower than heart level, you will get an inaccurate reading.
- Put both feet flat on the floor.
- Rest for 5 minutes.
- Turn the machine on and follow the instructions on the machine (or in the user's guide).

How to use the wrist cuff

- Place the cuff ½ inch above your wrist bone.
- Put both feet flat on the floor.
- Rest for 5 minutes.
- Push the start button and then raise the cuff to heart level. An indicator light will appear when the cuff is at the correct height.

After you take your blood pressure

- The blood pressure machine will show your systolic (top) and diastolic (bottom) numbers.
- If you have a blood pressure reading that is higher than you expect, rest for 15 minutes and then take your blood pressure again.
- If your second blood pressure reading is still higher than you expected, follow the follow-up instructions in the table on the front side of this fact sheet based on your reading.
- Write the date, time, blood pressure reading, which arm it was taken on, the heart rate or pulse and if you took your medicine. Bring this information with you when you go to your appointment with your health care provider.
- Turn the machine off.

Machine Care

- Keep the machine in its original container.
- Store the machine away from heat, cold and humidity. Do not keep it in the bathroom or near the kitchen sink.
- Keep the machine out of the reach of children.
- Have your machine checked at least once a year. Take it to your health care provider's office or local fire station.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use, clean and store the machine.
- If you cannot get an accurate reading, talk with your health care provider.