

Everything you ever wanted to know about

Checking Your Blood Pressure & Buying a BP Monitor



The Definitive Guide to

Checking Blood Pressure

Version 1.0 | 50ish.org

What you should know before buying a

Blood Pressure Monitor



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Additional Resources from the team at 50ish.org

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Hypertension - Most Common Health Condition In Men Over 45

There is no more common health condition among men over the age of 45 than hypertension, also known as high blood pressure. By the age of 45, about 20% of men will be diagnosed with it. By the age of 65, about 50% of men will be diagnosed with the condition, and the percentages only rise with age after 65.



High blood pressure is associated with increased risk of heart attack and stroke. For every 20 points a man's systolic blood pressure (**the first number**) averages over 110, he has a 100% increase in the risk of heart attack or stroke.

For just every 10 points a man's diastolic blood pressure (**the second number**) averages over 75, he also has a 100% increase in the risk of heart attack or stroke.

There are also some other health risks that come with high blood pressure that doctors usually don't tell men about.

- **High blood pressure interferes with erectile strength.** If the blood vessels leading into the penis cannot open up to let blood flow through, erections fizzle.
- **High blood pressure changes penis size too.** Even when the penis is not erect, its size is largely determined by blood flow. A penis can shrink from 5 or 6" (125 to 150 mm) to 1 to 3" (25 to 75 mm) in its flaccid state after several years of untreated high blood pressure. And at some point erections may no longer be possible at all.
- **High blood pressure causes dry skin and hair loss on the lower legs.** Oxygenated blood flows down from the heart to the feet. High blood pressure does not interfere with the process. After the blood circulates to the feet, however, it has to return to the heart through the veins.
- **High blood pressure makes it very hard for blood to flow** against the force of gravity. The valves in the veins may wear out, so that the skin and muscles of the legs don't receive oxygen and nourishment from normal blood flow. The skin dries out, turns brown, flakes, and cracks, opening itself to infections that are hard to heal. And when muscles and nerves are affected, there are more injuries to the feet, shins, ankles, and knees.
- **High blood pressure affects eyesight and kidney function**, especially when men also have poorly controlled diabetes. The combination of high blood pressure and high blood sugar can damage the fine blood vessels in the eyes and kidneys, causing retinopathy and chronic kidney failure.



Which Men Need to Measure Blood Pressure at Home?

If your blood pressure is high or low enough that your doctor has put you on medication, chances are that it's a good idea to buy a monitor for home blood pressure testing. It's always possible that you just happened to have seen your doctor on especially good or bad days at the time of your reading(s).

The more often you take your blood pressure, the better information you and your physician will have to assess whether your medication is working and whether or not you need more or less of it in the future.

Blood pressure that is unusually low or unusually high at certain times of day indicates a hormonal problem.

Men who have a condition commonly referred to as adrenal burnout, for example, may have **low blood pressure** first thing in the morning that spikes after breakfast as the adrenal glands sputter and spurt to release their early morning dump of cortisol.

Men who have **higher blood pressure** when they stand up, than when they sit down (the opposite is usually the case) may have a condition called autonomic dystonia, which indicates that a condition like diabetes has damaged nerves to the heart.

These nuances of blood pressure control may not be caught at the doctor's surgery but have important implications for long term health. And they are not the sort of thing that gets remedies with a blood pressure pill either.

Borderline high blood pressure is also an indication to do home testing. Data from home testing, preferably from a monitor that can download readings to a home computer for printout or email, can help your doctor clarify whether you need medication, and, if you need medication, which medication and how much.

Some men get "**white coat hypertension**," blood pressure readings that are only high at the doctor's surgery. Whether the rise in blood pressure is due to the fact that the doctor scares them or turns them on, readings taken at home can identify the issue. And diabetics need to be especially careful to monitor blood pressure in order to avoid the risk of kidney disease.

You don't need a prescription to buy a blood pressure monitor, but it's not a bad idea to discuss taking blood pressure readings at home with your doctor first. Depending on your country, your insurance may cover the cost of your monitor if your doctor writes a prescription for it.



Choosing the Best Blood Pressure Monitor

Blood pressure monitors have to be accurate. They should be easy to use, that is, they should be easy to read, store readings for download to a personal computer (preferably for multiple users), and flash warning signs when they detect extremely high or extremely low blood pressure or an irregular heartbeat.

They should fit different sizes of arms or wrists comfortably. And they should take readings in seconds, not minutes.



All the models listed here have been tested for accuracy by comparing the reading on the monitor with the readings done by two skilled testers, one a nurse, and one a paramedic. You don't have to worry about any of these devices giving you inaccurate readings. This leaves you free to make your choices on the basis of cost and convenience, and your personal preference for testing on your arm or testing on your wrist.

Since all the models reviewed here measure blood pressure accurately, they are listed in alphabetical order. All prices are in US dollars. We'll start with the best blood pressure monitor for use on the wrist and the best blood pressure monitor for use on the arm.

Omron 7 Series Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor (BP652)

\$59.95+ Of all the monitors reviewed on this page, the Omron 7 Series Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor (BP652) is the easiest to use. Simply slip the cuff over your wrist, wait 30 seconds and the accurate blood pressure readings appear.

Often offered on sale for as little as \$59.95 (the regular retail is \$139.99), it may be as inexpensive as all but ReliOn (Walmart) monitors, while offering nearly the best collection of features.

The unit stores up to 100 readings for each of two people. The one drawback to this monitor? It does not download data to a computer, but it is wearable for tracking your blood pressure throughout the day, and many health professionals describe it as "unbelievably accurate."

What makes this blood pressure monitor so accurate? The Omron 7 is designed to measure blood pressure at the "heart zone," at the same level as the heart. The meter has an orange and blue lighting system that first tells the user whether the meter is correctly placed on the wrist, and then tells the user whether the meter is held at the same level as the heart — which gives the most accurate readings.





Omron 7 Series Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor (BP652),
continued from previous page...

Some people who have had diabetes long enough to develop a condition called neuropathy may get inaccurate readings with this meter because the nerves that control their blood pressure are no longer "wired" in a way that causes lower blood pressure with 'standing up' and higher blood pressure 'sitting down'.

For them, readings may be 10-20 points too high if the meter is held the way the blue and orange lights suggest. See your doctor for an explanation of the phenomenon and suggestions on how to compensate for it.

Withings Blood Pressure Monitor

\$129.99 If you want to connect your blood pressure monitor directly to your iPad, iPod, or iPhone, the Withings Blood Pressure Monitor is for you. The adjustable cuff slips on easily on arms of all sizes, adjusting itself, and displays systolic pressure, diastolic pressure, and pulse rate in under 15 seconds.



Complete instructions are displayed on your Apple device. Each measurement is automatically saved, and can be displayed as a chart of numbers or as a graph. Every member of the family can use the same device. Measurements can be emailed to your doctor, or saved to MicroSoft Health Vault, AvidaOne, TrainingPeaks, or other services.

It's important to know that the support for this device is on the device itself, not on a website. This blood pressure monitor is a little pricey at \$129.99, but it's absolutely top of the line for ease of use and connectivity. Consider using it with a Withings Wi-Fi Weight Scale that keeps track of weight, body fat, and BMI for up to 8 users.

Not everyone, of course, needs or wants computer connectivity. On the following pages we'll go through other decent monitors, some of them a lot less expensive, and a few that are a little more costly. All are good brands that will give you accurate readings.



CVS BP3MV1-1E SKU#800230

\$59.95- Retailing for \$59.95 but often on sale for up to 30% off, the CVS BP3MV1-1E SKU#800230 is relatively inexpensive home blood pressure monitor with standard features. It comes with a single adjustable cuff that fits over all the largest and smallest arms, and it displays systolic and diastolic pressures with pulse rate, in around 45 seconds. ✓

This model flashes warnings for irregular heartbeat and unusually high or lower blood pressure readings. The monitor records 120 blood pressure readings that can be read by scrolling through the display.

After 120 readings, the monitor starts overwriting the oldest reading. Readings cannot be downloaded from the monitor to a home computer. The cuff has a one-year warranty.

iHealth Blood Pressure Monitor BP3

\$100 Usually retailing for around \$100 but occasionally on sale, the iHealth Blood Pressure Monitor BP3 comes with a one-size fits all cuff. It displays blood pressure and pulse in 35 seconds, and flashes warnings for unusually high or low blood pressure and irregular heartbeat. It can be programmed to record readings for multiple users in a household, but the readings cannot be downloaded into a personal computer. ✓

LifeSource UA-767PV L I, LifeSource UA-767PV, and LifeSource UA-767PVS

\$38.48+ The LifeSource UA-767PV L I, LifeSource UA-767PV, and LifeSource UA-767PVS are three very similar blood pressure monitors that retail for \$38.48 to \$79.99. All three monitors come with a one-size-fits-all cuff and a monitor that accurately measures blood pressure in 40 seconds. ✓

These monitors have warning sounds for unusually high or unusually low blood pressure and for irregular heartbeat, but they do not record readings, do not support multiple users, and cannot be used to download readings to a personal computer.

Continued on next page...




Medron Automatic Blood Pressure Monitor

With Bigger LCD, USB -Computer/PC -Link and Hypersense Technology

The Medron Automatic Blood Pressure Monitor with Bigger LCD, USB Computer/PC Link and Hypersense Technology Is not the easiest blood pressure monitor to find, but many users find it to be the easiest to use. The arm cuff fits arms up to 12.6 inches (320 mm) in diameter and the monitor has error detection features that give a warning if the unit is incorrectly placed. Blood pressure readings take about 30 seconds.


This monitor records data in a form that can be downloaded to your personal computer for printing out or emailing to your doctor. (You may read Amazon customer reviews that are critical of the unit's software, but these have been fixed with a program the manufacturer calls Medron Health Plus, and if there are any problems, the company maintains a toll-free help line.) Batteries and USB cable included.

Microlife BP3NA1-1X

\$70 - Retailing for \$70, the Microlife BP3NA1-1X is one of the least expensive home blood pressure monitors offering a feature for downloading blood pressure readings to a home computer. It comes with either one large cuff and one small cuff, or a single adjustable cuff that fits most arm sizes. 

It displays systolic and diastolic pressures and heart rate in 50 seconds on monitor attached to the cuff. Moving the cuff up or down the arm will restart the reading; some users complain that the device tends to be "touchy" about being moved.

North American Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor with Memory Function

\$24.99 - In the bargain basement of blood pressure monitors, the North American Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor with Memory Function (which is made in China) has a manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$24.99 and often is available on Amazon for as little as \$15.99. 

The problem here is that you get what you pay for. This wrist monitor—after about a minute up to about 90 seconds—gives accurate blood pressure readings if it is placed directly over the heart. It gives wildly variable readings if it is placed anywhere else.

If you can discipline yourself to use the monitor exactly as directed each and every time, it's a great bargain, especially considering its memory function stores 100 readings per user. But if you have trouble lifting your wrist or you tend to forget where to place the meter—you might want a more expensive model (AAA batteries are not included).



Omron 5 Series Upper Arm Blood Pressure Monitor (BP742) i

\$42.99+ Selling for \$42.99 to \$119.99, the Omron 5 Series Upper Arm Blood Pressure Monitor (BP742) i has the disadvantage of coming with a single-size cuff that may not fit unusually large or unusually small arms. ✓

It reports readings in 35 seconds, flashing warnings for unusually low or high blood pressure and also for irregular heartbeat. It can be used by multiple members of a household, but it does not have a download feature.

Omron 10 Series Upper Arm Blood Pressure Monitor (BP785)

\$59.95+ Selling for \$59.95 to \$178.25, the Omron 10 Series Upper Arm Blood Pressure Monitor (BP785) can be ordered with either 2 cuffs, 1 large and 1 small, or a Velcro-banded "one cuffs fits most" cuff that can be adapted for multiple users. ✓

This model reports readings in 35 seconds, and flashes warnings for irregular heartbeat and unusually high or low blood pressure readings. It is suitable for multiple users, but does not download readings to a computer.

Panasonic EW3109W

\$60 Retailing around \$60, the Panasonic EW3109W offers the bare essentials of blood pressure monitoring. It provides a one-size-fits-all cuff and a monitor that shows a reading once. You have to jot down the reading on paper right away if you want to record it. Like all the monitors reviewed here, however, it offers accurate readings. ✓

Panasonic EW3152A i

\$130 Looking and feeling like a drugstore blood pressure monitor, the Panasonic EW3152A i retails for about \$130. It has the advantage over most other retail blood pressure monitors in that it fits almost any size arm. ✓

It measure blood pressure in 40 seconds, and sounds warnings when blood pressure is too low or too high. It can support multiple users, recording readings separately for each, but it cannot be used to download readings to a computer, or online, and it does not feature a warning signal for irregular heartbeat.



ReliOn HEM-741CREL i

\$39.88 The ReliOn HEM-741CREL i is Walmart's "house" brand of blood pressure monitor, sold in stores and online. It usually retails for \$39.88. This ReliOn model comes with a one-size-fits-almost-all blood pressure cuff and a rectangular LED display that shows systolic and diastolic pressure and pulse rate in about 35 seconds. ✓

There are warning features for irregular heartbeat and unusually high or low blood pressure. This model does not download readings to a computer but does accommodate multiple users with separate data recording for each.

Rite Aid Health Care Blood Pressure Cuff Monitor Deluxe Automatic BP3AR1-4D

\$60 Matching the \$60 retail price of monitors offered by competing drugstore chains CVS and Walgreen's, the Rite Aid Health Care Blood Pressure Cuff Monitor Deluxe Automatic BP3AR1-4D comes with only one, usually described as uncomfortable, cuff. ✓

This model reports blood pressure readings in 45 seconds and has a warning feature for irregular heartbeat, but it does not have a warning feature for unusually low or high blood pressure.

This model does not record data for more than one user and has no feature for downloading data to a personal computer or online.

Walgreens Deluxe Arm Blood Pressure Monitor WGNBPA-540

\$59.95 The Walgreens Deluxe Arm Blood Pressure Monitor WGNBPA-540 is priced competitively at \$59.95, but many users complain that the cuff feels like a tourniquet. ✓

This model can be ordered either with two cuffs, one large and one small, or a single cuff with a Velcro band that fits all but unusually small or unusually large arms. It reports readings in 50 seconds on a meter that sits on the table rather than fits on the arm.

It flashes warnings for irregular heartbeat and unusually high or low blood pressure readings, but it cannot be used to download readings to a home computer.



Frequently Asked Questions - Using a Blood Pressure Monitor

There are **two key things** every man needs to know about using a blood pressure monitor. One is not so obvious, and the other is really obvious but often overlooked.

- 1.** The cuff has to be at the level of your heart (just below nipple level) or your readings will be either too low or too high.
- 2.** At risk of sounding obvious, it is not enough to take your reading. You also need to record it. That's why the monitors with the download features get our strongest recommendations.



Q & A - Monitoring Blood Pressure at Home

Q. The readings I take at home are very different from the readings taken at the doctor's surgery. Is the problem my meter?

A. Usually not. If the blood pressure readings you get at home are significantly lower than the blood pressure readings taken at your doctor's surgery, there may be an issue with tension caused by that visit.

This could be anything from having to hike through bad weather, to getting the parking lot at your doctor's surgery, concerned that you are about to be given bad news, or even an allergy to some cleaning agent used in the surgery building. Be sure your doctor knows about this discrepancy and evaluates you more completely before giving you new or different medication.

When blood pressure readings are higher at home than they are at the doctor's surgery, and you haven't been exercising hard, using caffeine or stimulants, or stressing out before you take your blood pressure readings, the problem is usually with the placement of the cuff.

Blood pressure is read at heart level. This means that you need to hold a wrist monitor to your chest while it is taking the reading. Letting your wrist flop down usually significantly increases your blood pressure numbers.

Q & A Continued on next page...



Q. What's the difference between the least expensive and most expensive blood pressure monitors on your list, if all of them measure blood pressure accurately?

A. Ease of use, basically. If you are diligent about recording your blood pressure numbers, a less expensive monitor may work just as well for you as the Omron 7 and Writhing Blood Pressure Monitor, that receive our highest recommendation.

But before you opt for a cheaper monitor, be sure you will be recording the data yourself if the monitor won't record it for you. A \$45 monitor is not a bargain if you forget to record your readings or you lose your records and your doctor has to make an educated guess as to the medication you actually need.

And with the very least expensive monitors, it's important to remember that they have to operated at heart-level, at the height as your heart. Otherwise, readings may be inaccurate.

Q. What is the best time of day to take blood pressure at home?

A. The best time of day to take blood pressure is the same time every day—no matter what that is. It is also best that you take your blood pressure with consistent reference to your daily routine.

Don't take your blood pressure right after a heated discussion with your boss one day, first thing after you get up the next day, and just before going to bed on the third day.

Try to measure blood pressure not just at the same time every day but also in approximately the same circumstances—unless of course, you want to find out the effects of emotional stress and exercise on your blood pressure.

We hope you have enjoyed reading this guide and found it to be of some benefit to you. Remember, you can give "**Checking Blood Pressure & Buying a BP Monitor**" away to family and friends as long as you do not change any part of it. You CANNOT sell this guide, but if you own a website, you can offer it to your visitors as a free gift.

Kind Regards

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