

# Monitor Your Blood Pressure At Home

By Edna Greig



High blood pressure, or hypertension, affects about one in four American adults and is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Blood pressure readings consist of two numbers. A top number of 140 or greater and/or a bottom number of 90 or greater is defined as high blood pressure. In addition, a reading from 120/80 to 139/89 is defined as "prehypertension" and is considered a risk for developing high blood pressure in the future.

An individual's blood pressure can be quite variable. It can vary based upon the time of day or the amount of stress one is under. Some people experience "white coat hypertension" which is an elevated blood pressure resulting from the nervousness of being in the doctor's office. Others experience "masked hypertension" which is when readings are normal at the doctor's office but high at other times.

Because blood pressure readings can be so variable, people with high blood pressure or prehypertension can benefit by monitoring their blood pressure themselves at home. There are a number of blood pressure monitors available for home use. Those that measure blood pressure using an arm cuff are the most accurate. Digital models have cuffs that inflate and deflate automatically and most have a memory feature that records multiple readings. Although not covered by insurance, a good quality digital monitor can be purchased for under \$100. If you purchase a home monitor, you should bring it to your doctor's office to compare readings to ensure that your monitor is accurate.

Benefits of home blood pressure monitoring include:

- It can detect white coat hypertension and masked hypertension.
- It can detect if blood pressure is higher in the morning which is a greater risk for cardiovascular disease.
- It monitors the effects of lifestyle changes or medications between visits to the doctor.
- It enables people with prehypertension to monitor their blood pressure regularly and detect if their condition worsens.
- It can motivate people to take a greater interest in managing their blood pressure.

Check with your doctor to determine if home blood pressure monitoring is right for you.

About the author: Edna Greig is a freelance writer who specializes in scientific and medical topics.