How to Check Your Own Blood Pressure

What is blood pressure?
Your heart is a pump. Its job is to pump blood throughout your body. Each time your heart beats, it creates a force. Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels. Blood pressure is written as two numbers.

- The highest number is the amount of force or pressure pushing against the artery when your heart pumps out blood. This is your systolic pressure.
- The lowest number is the amount of pressure pushing against the artery when your heart relaxes. This second number is called the diastolic pressure.
- A blood pressure is written like this: (systolic) 120 / 80 (diastolic).

Equipment to measure your blood pressure
There are different types of devices to measure blood pressure. Most often for home use, an aneroid device is used because it is safe and less expensive. The steps to check your blood pressure on this handout are for this type of device.

Automatic devices can be more costly but can be good for people with hearing or vision problems. The automatic devices can be more sensitive to body movements and cuff placement so often it is harder to get accurate readings.
Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about what kind of equipment you should use to check your blood pressure.

Have your blood pressure equipment checked at least one time each year to be sure it is accurate. It may need adjusted more often if you drop it or bump it.

Gather your equipment

- A stethoscope is used to listen to the sounds of your heart. The stethoscope has two ear pieces to hear through. The ear pieces are connected to a long tube that has a rounded end called the diaphragm. The diaphragm is placed on the pulse in your arm. This allows you to hear the sounds of your heart pumping.

- A device called a sphygmomanometer is used to measure your blood pressure. The device has a cuff, bulb, valve, tubing and gauge.

- The cuff has a rubber bladder inside. The cuff wraps around your arm.

- You squeeze the bulb to pump air into the bladder to make the cuff tight on your arm.

- You turn the valve on the bulb to keep air in or let the air out of the cuff.

- The gauge has numbers and lines that you read to get your blood pressure numbers.

- Blood pressure record sheet to write down your numbers.
Checking your blood pressure

1. Record the time and date on your blood pressure record sheet.

2. Sit in a comfortable position. Push your sleeve up and lay your arm on a table with your palm up. If your clothes are too tight around your arm, take your shirt or blouse off before checking your blood pressure.

3. Place the first two fingers of your other hand on the inside of your elbow and find your pulse. This is where you will listen to measure your blood pressure. This is the brachial artery.

4. Wrap the cuff around your upper arm just above the elbow. Make sure the lower end of the cuff is about one inch above your elbow. The cuff should be snug around your arm.

5. Close the valve on the bulb, but not too tightly.

6. Place the ear pieces of the stethoscope in your ears. Place the diaphragm of the stethoscope over the pulse in the bend of your elbow.

7. Squeeze the bulb repeatedly and pump up the cuff 30 points higher than your usual systolic blood pressure (higher number).

8. Loosen the valve to allow air to slowly escape from the cuff. Watch the gauge closely. When you hear the first beat, read the number from the dial and remember the number to write it down later. This is the top number or systolic number.
9. Continue to slowly release the air. When the beating sounds stop, read the number on the dial and remember that number to write it down later. This is the bottom number or diastolic number. Let the rest of the air out of the cuff.

10. Remove the cuff from your arm. Write down your blood pressure on your blood pressure record sheet.

Always recheck your blood pressure if you get a reading that is higher or lower than normal. Wait at least one minute between blood pressure checks.

**If your blood pressure is higher than 180 systolic or 110 diastolic**, call your doctor right away. Your doctor will tell you what to do.

**Be sure to keep a record of your blood pressure readings.**
- Always write your blood pressure down on your record sheet.
- Ask your doctor or nurse what your blood pressure goal range should be. A normal blood pressure is below 120 / 80.
- Take your blood pressure record with you to share with your doctor when you go in for your appointments.
- Ask your doctor or nurse what your blood pressure is when it is checked in the office.
- Follow your diet and exercise plan.
- Take any medicines your doctor has prescribed for you, even if you feel better.

My blood pressure goal range is ____________________________.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.