



Healthy Church

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Demystifying Blood Pressure!

Have you ever wondered just what blood pressure is *in plain language*? We hear the terms systolic and diastolic from the lips of our health care providers when they are talking about our blood pressure. We nod our heads like we know what they are talking about, but the fact is, we have no clue what in the *sheesh-tolic* they are talking about! And we think to ourselves, that they might as well be talking Greek!

So, to put it in *living room language*, your heart is a muscle, and it spends its entire life PUMPING and RESTING. With that said, if you had a blood pressure of 120/80 the pumping part of that number is the 120 and the resting part of that number is the 80. It turns out that top and bottom numbers *both* matter. In fact, if either one of them is high, you have hypertension, according to Parveen Gard, MD, (in the summary article below) and your potential for heart attack or stroke is increased.



**Sometimes it's hard to tell what fact is and what is fiction,
so, let's look at **myths** and **facts**:**

- **Myth:** The signs of high blood pressure are obvious. **Fact:** High blood pressure has no symptoms
- **Myth:** If I don't add too much salt to my food, I can eat what I want. **Fact:** It's not just table salt you must worry about. Some of the most common sources of sodium are found in breads & rolls, poultry, meat dishes like meatloaf, cheeseburgers & other sandwiches, luncheon meats like ham or turkey, pizza, pasta dishes, soups, cheese and snack foods like chips and pretzels.
- **Myth:** Drinking coffee can raise my blood pressure. **Fact:** coffee doesn't but drinking alcohol can!
- **Myth:** High blood pressure is more common in men. **Fact:** It depends on age. Before age 50, high blood pressure is more common in men than women, but after menopause, a woman's risk increases and can be even higher than a man's.

- **Myth:** The risk of high blood pressure is the same for people of all races. **Fact:** Black adults have an increased risk of developing high blood pressure.
- **Myth:** I don't need to worry about blood pressure, if I'm young. **Fact:** Although high blood pressure is more common in older people, younger adults can have high blood pressure too.
- **Myth:** There is nothing I can do to prevent high blood pressure, if it runs in my family. **Fact:** Lifestyle changes can reduce your risk. Having a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and regular exercise can have a large impact on your blood pressure.

Click on <https://www.keckmedicine.org/blog/10-blood-pressure-mythsandfacts/#:~:text=Does%20drinking%20alcohol> to read the complete article.

Myth: I don't have to worry about taking my blood pressure...my doctor takes it!

Fact: Your engagement with your practitioner during the taking of your blood pressure can result in either higher or lower blood pressure readings.



Studies by Johns Hopkins and the American Medical Association revealed that many times, blood pressures are taken incorrectly in a medical practice, resulting in misdiagnoses. As a result, a national campaign was implemented to educate providers **AND** patients on the proper protocols for taking blood pressures.

Proper Technique for Accurate Blood Pressure Measurement

When your blood pressure (BP) is taken, *be aware of the following guidelines:*

- A validated, **automated device** should be used to measure your BP (**not a wrist cuff**). The American Medical Association and Johns Hopkins stresses an electronic monitor instead of the the cuff and stethoscope method, which is more prone to mistakes.
- The cuff should be the correct size for your arm (if the cuff is too small, it should **not be placed** on your lower arm by your wrist. This gives an incorrect reading). Ask your provider to use the correct cuff size for your arm and tell them you will wait while to go to retrieve on.
- **Cuff should be placed on your bare arm** (not over clothing no matter how thin the material is: this can give an invalid blood pressure reading).
- You should be seated comfortably and quietly for at least five (5) minutes – no texting.
- Your back supported (don't be sitting on the examination table with your feet dangling and your back unsupported, this can yield an incorrect reading).
- Your arm should be supported
- A proper size BP cuff placed at your heart level (your upper arm above your elbow)
- Your legs should be uncrossed and your feet flat on the ground or supported by a foot stool
- **No one** should be talking during the measurement, **especially you!**

If your blood pressure is 140/90 mm Hg or higher, it should be confirmed.

- The steps above should be repeated
- You should ensure your bladder is empty
- You should rest quietly for at least five minutes
- **At least three (3) BP measurements should be taken and averaged**

Check the infographic below to see how any one of these can **RAISE your blood pressure reading!**

AMA MAP™
Hypertension


7 SIMPLE TIPS TO GET AN ACCURATE BLOOD PRESSURE READING

The common positioning errors can result in inaccurate blood pressure measurement. Figures shown are estimates of how improper positioning can potentially impact blood pressure readings.

Sources:

1. Pickering, et al. Recommendations for Blood Pressure Measurement in Humans and Experimental Animals Part 1: Blood Pressure Measurement in Humans. *Circulation*. 2005;111: 697-716.
2. Handier J. The importance of accurate blood pressure measurement. *The Permanente Journal*/Summer 2009/Volume 13 No. 3 51

This 7 simple tips to get an accurate blood pressure reading was adapted with permission of the American Medical Association and The Johns Hopkins University. The original copyrighted content can be found at www.ama-assn.org/ama-johns-hopkins-blood-pressure-resources.



- USE CORRECT CUFF SIZE**
Cuff too small adds 2-10 mm Hg
- DON'T HAVE A CONVERSATION**
Talking or active listening adds 10 mm Hg
- EMPTY BLADDER FIRST**
Full bladder adds 10 mm Hg
- SUPPORT ARM AT HEART LEVEL**
Unsupported arm adds 10 mm Hg
- SUPPORT BACK/FEET**
Unsupported back and feet adds 6 mm Hg
- KEEP LEGS UNCROSSED**
Crossed legs add 2-8 mm Hg
- PUT CUFF ON BARE ARM**
Cuff over clothing adds 5-50 mm Hg

This resource is part of AMA MAP™ Hypertension, a quality improvement program. Using a single or subset of AMA MAP™ tools or resources does not constitute implementing this program. AMA MAP™ includes guidance from AMA hypertension experts and has been shown to improve BP control rates by 10 percentage points and sustain results.

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