

Measuring Blood Pressure at Home

Why is high blood pressure (BP) important?

High blood pressure (hypertension), increases your risk of having a stroke, heart disease or kidney disease. A stroke can be very disabling. It may permanently affect your speech, or you may lose use of one arm or your ability to walk, or ability to look after yourself. Stroke can cause death.

But you can reduce your risk of a stroke or heart attack by taking medications to lower your blood pressure. As with all medications, it is important to know when a **medication is working or causing a side effect.** You can easily manage side effects by letting your doctor know about them. Your doctor will then adjust your medications(s).

How to know if your BP medication is working:

It is not possible to tell just by “feeling” if your blood pressure is in the healthy range. But you can check this yourself. You (or your family) can measure your blood pressure at home. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend which device to buy and show you how to use it.

How to know if your BP medication is causing a side effect:

By measuring your blood pressure, you will also know if your BP is too low. This may happen if you are **sick or drinking less fluid than usual, or if your medication dose needs adjusting.** If your BP is too low, you may feel dizzy, or lightheaded or feel faint (like you are going to pass out), or even pass out (lose consciousness). This side effect can **easily be treated** by your doctor who will adjust your medication.

Ask for a Medication Plan for Sick Days

Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a **Medication Plan for Sick Days.** This plan will tell you if you should stop taking any medications just while you are unwell. Following this plan may help to prevent you from coming to hospital with low blood pressure.

How to know if my medication is working, my target BP

Ask your doctor for your target BP (two numbers) and write it here: ____/____ mmHg (units)

The higher number is the “**systolic BP**” (the pressure of blood in your arteries when they are full after your heart has pumped blood into them), and the “**diastolic BP**” (lower number) is when your arteries are the least full, and your heart is the most relaxed, before it pumps (beats) again.

Your target BP is the BP that, when reached, will mean that **you are reducing your risk of stroke and heart disease.** Ask your doctor how often to measure your BP: it may be once or twice a day

WHEN TO GET MEDICAL ATTENTION:

If your blood pressure is too low (your medication may be causing a side effect):

- 1) Generally, if your systolic BP (higher number), is 90 mmHg or below, but you otherwise feel well: **Call your doctor’s office**
- 2) If you feel lightheaded, dizzy, feel faint, lose consciousness (pass out) or experience chest pain/tightness: **Go to the Emergency Department.**

Call HealthLink BC at 811 any time for advice 24/7

WHEN TO GET MEDICAL ATTENTION:

If your blood pressure is too high (your medication may not be working):

- 1) If your BP is 180 / 120 mmHg or more, even on ONE reading, (when you are rested and relaxed) do the following:
 - If you feel well, make an appointment to see **your doctor OR**
 - Go to the **Emergency Department** if you have any ONE of the following: a bad headache, vision changes, difficulty speaking or walking, nausea or vomiting, shortness of breath, chest pain /tightness or back pain, or are pregnant.
- 2) For most people, if your systolic BP (higher number) remains more than 160 mmHg or your diastolic BP (lower number) remains more than 90 mmHg for a month, you should see your doctor.
- 3) But ask your doctor to let you know what BP values are **too high for you** and mean that you should see them:
 - **If BP higher than _____/_____ for 1 month, I need to see my doctor.**

ORTHOSTATIC HYPOTENSION

What is it?

If you sometimes feel **dizzy or lightheaded or feel as if you are about to faint (pass out) when you stand** up from a lying or sitting position you could have a **side effect from a medication**. It is important to let your doctor know. **Make an appointment to see them.**

The medical name for this condition, is orthostatic hypotension which describes low blood pressure that occurs on standing from a lying or sitting position. Your doctor will assess if something else is causing this, but your medication may need to be adjusted.

Why is it important?

If untreated this condition can cause you to have **a fall**. It may even cause you to lose consciousness (faint or pass out). Falls can be serious and lead to a broken hip or a **head injury**.

How to keep yourself safe (and reduce your risk of falls):

Until you see your doctor, GO SLOW when getting up from a lying or sitting position.

- Sit at the edge of the bed for at least 30 seconds, then, swing your legs over the side of the bed and wait again.
- Stand up slowly, close to something that you can hold onto for support, if needed.
- Let your family know so they can remind you to get up slowly.
- Until you see your doctor, your family should keep a close eye on you as you are at an increased risk of a fall.

If your doctor's office is closed, or until your appointment, call your pharmacist. Your pharmacist can determine if your medication(s) should be adjusted temporarily until they (or you) can speak with your doctor.

If your symptoms do not improve with getting up slowly, you should go to the Emergency Department.

You can call HealthLink BC at 811 for advice 24/7.



Making better
decisions together
with patients
and families

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