

Blood pressure: Know your numbers

One of the biggest contributors to heart disease and stroke.

Most people with high blood pressure feel completely fine; however, that's exactly why it's nicknamed "the silent killer".

Left unchecked, it quietly raises your risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. The good news: checking it takes minutes, and there's always something within your control.

You are in the driving seat of your own health. Ask yourself, have you had your blood pressure checked in the last 12 months? If not, today is a great day to start.

Why this matters

THE SILENT RISK

- High blood pressure (hypertension) usually has no warning signs
- It's one of the top causes of heart attack and stroke in the UK
- Over time it can also affect your kidneys, eyes and memory
- It can be present for years before it's ever picked up

CHECKING REGULARLY

- Catching it early means more options and better outcomes
- You get to see your own trends over time, not just one snapshot
- Small lifestyle changes work best when started early
- Knowing your numbers puts you back in the driving seat

Three easy ways to get checked

1

Local pharmacy

Most pharmacies offer a free walk-in blood pressure check - no appointment needed.

2

Your GP practice

Ask reception for a blood pressure check - many practices also have a self-check machine in the waiting room.

3

Home monitor

Buy your own upper-arm monitor to check regularly at home. Choose one from a validated device list (see below) and use the correct cuff size.

Doctor Wendy's recommended monitors

Patients often ask me which blood pressure monitor I recommend. Below is a short list of the ones I genuinely trust, which cover a range of budgets. All three are clinically validated upper-arm monitors.

I only recommend products I'd happily suggest to my own family, or use in my own clinical practice.

Price tier	Monitor	Why it made the list
Higher end	Omron M7 Intelli IT AFib	Screens for possible Atrial Fibrillation with every reading, highly accurate Intelli Wrap cuff, Bluetooth if you like tracking your trends.
Best value	Omron X2 Basic	Straightforward, reliable and validated. A great all-rounder for most people.
Budget	A&D Medical UA-611	BIHS-approved and ESH clinically validated, simple one-button use, still fully accurate.

When ordering, check the manufacturer's guidance on cuff sizes as a poorly fitting cuff is the most common cause of an inaccurate reading.

How often should I check?

Your situation	How often
Under 40, no risk factors, previously normal	Every 3-5 years
40 or over, previously normal (below 120/80)	At least every 5 years - ask about your free NHS Health Check
Raised or borderline (120/80-139/89)	Once a year
Diagnosed and stable on treatment	At least once a year, plus after any medication change
Starting home monitoring, or GP has asked you to	Twice daily for 4-7 days (see below), then as advised

How to take an accurate reading at home

1

Before you start

Avoid caffeine, food, exercise and smoking/vaping for 30 minutes beforehand, and empty your bladder. Then sit and rest quietly for 5 minutes. No phone, no talking.

2

Get into position

Sit with your back supported, feet flat on the floor and your legs uncrossed. Rest your bare arm on a table so the cuff sits level with your heart.

3

During the reading

Stay still and quiet. Don't talk, check your phone, or cross your legs. All of these can temporarily push your reading up.

4

Take 3 readings, then average

Take three readings, one to two minutes apart. If the first is a lot higher than the others, ignore it. This is common and often just your body settling. Average your remaining two readings; this is far more reliable than trusting any single number.

What the numbers mean

Category	Top number (systolic)	Bottom number (diastolic)
Generally healthy	Below 120	Below 80
Raised - keep an eye on it	120-139	80-89
High - talk to your GP	140 or more	90 or more

General guidance only, based on standard UK targets, your personal target may differ. Not a substitute for medical advice; always discuss your results with your GP or pharmacist.

A NOTE ON TARGETS: These are general UK reference ranges (based on NHS and NICE guidance) - your own personal target may be different, especially if you are pregnant, over 80, or have other health conditions.

This guide is for general information only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Always discuss your own results and target with your GP or pharmacist.

One high reading is not a diagnosis. Stress, pain, a full bladder or poor technique can all push a reading up temporarily - rest, repeat it correctly, and look at the overall pattern rather than a single number.

140/90 or higher, consistently: book a routine appointment with your GP or pharmacist.

180/120 or higher, with no symptoms: contact your GP practice or NHS 111 the same day.

180/120 or higher, with symptoms such as chest pain, breathlessness, severe headache or vision changes: call 999 immediately.

Keep reading to start taking control of your blood pressure today →

Your Six for Life® toolkit for taking control of blood pressure

Area	Quick tips
Nourish	Cut back on: • Adding salt to your food. • Processed, packaged and takeaway food. • Cured meats, ready meals and stock cubes. Add more of: • Vegetables, fruit, beans and lentils (potassium helps balance sodium). • Wholegrains, nuts and seeds. • Herbs, spices, lemon and garlic instead of salt for flavour. Check out Doctor Wendy's Leafy Greens Guide. Rich in dietary nitrates, which your body converts to nitric oxide, a natural blood-vessel relaxant. Download here →
Move	Start where you are: • Anything is better than nothing. • The movement that gets done beats the “perfect” plan that never starts. Even a 5 minute walk counts. • Build up gradually. Easy ways to begin: • A short walk after a meal. • Take the stairs, or park further away. • Gardening, dancing or swimming all count too.
Sleep	Poor or short sleep is linked to higher blood pressure: • Aim for a consistent bedtime and wake where you can. • Loud snoring or gasping in sleep can be a sign of sleep apnoea; worth mentioning to your GP.
Connect	The evidence: • Loneliness and social isolation predicts rising blood pressure over time, independent of other risk factors. • Poor connection is linked to higher risk of heart disease and stroke too. Reach out to one person today, a call, a favour, an act of kindness.
Stress	Practice breath-work. Slow breathing activates your body's natural “rest and digest” response. Try this: • Slow, deep breaths (in for 4, out for 6) for 5 minutes a day. • A short pause before reacting when you feel your stress rising. • Simple relaxation or mindfulness practices, even just a few minutes. • Gently moving your body in a way that feels calming to you.
Protect	Try to reduce or avoid harmful substances: • Alcohol raises blood pressure, especially with regular heavier drinking. • Smoking damages blood vessels and raises heart disease risk. • Regular, long-term vaping keeps the cardiovascular system under constant stress, increasing the risk of chronic high blood pressure.

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MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

This content is for general health information only and does not constitute personal medical advice. Please consult your GP or a qualified healthcare professional before making significant changes to your diet, exercise or health routine.

EVIDENCE BASE

NHS & NICE hypertension guidance | British and Irish Hypertension Society (BIHS) | peer-reviewed research.

DISCLOSURES

If you choose to buy any products via the links provided in this guide, I may earn a small commission at no extra cost to you.