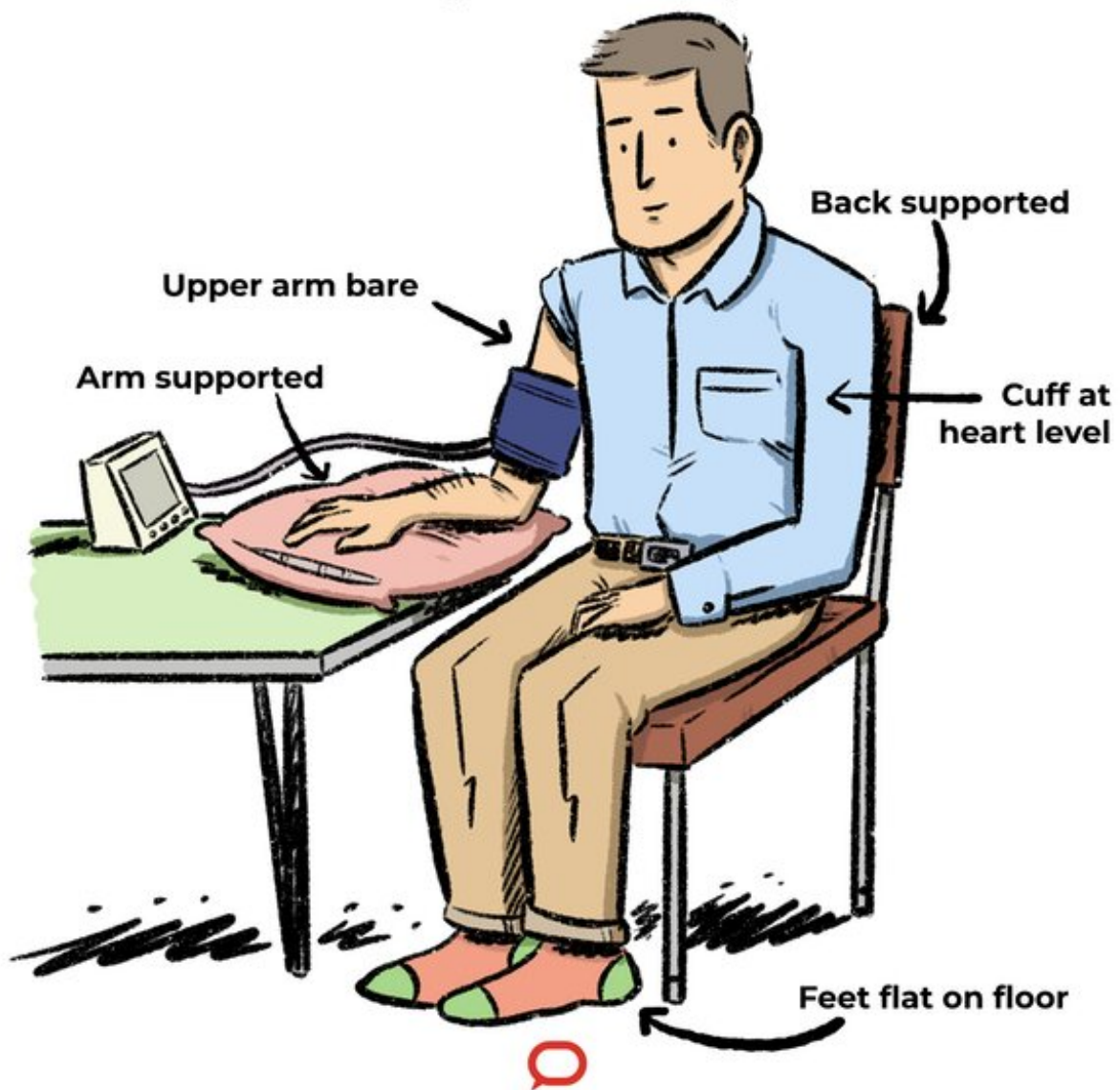


How to manage your blood pressure in isolation

April 23 2020, by James Sharman, Mark Nelson and Markus Schlaich

How to sit to have your blood pressure taken



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Maintaining healthy blood pressure is [important](#) during (and after) the coronavirus pandemic.

With about [one in three](#) Australian adults having high [blood](#) pressure, many people will be needing to monitor their own blood pressure in isolation.

So it's a great time to make sure you're accurately measuring and optimally managing your blood pressure at home.

When it comes to blood pressure, home really is better

Blood pressure measurements taken at home are a [better indication](#) of your true blood pressure. They're also a better indication of your risk of [heart attack and stroke](#) than measurements doctors take in their surgeries or in hospital.

Blood pressure readings by doctors are generally even higher than those measured by other health professionals, [such as nurses](#).

This is due to the "white coat" effect, where a doctor's presence can lead to your blood pressure (and heart rate) rising, something we've known about since the [1980s](#).

So today's [guidelines](#) recommend doctors confirm someone has high blood pressure using methods outside the clinic.

The [ideal method](#) while in isolation is to measure your blood pressure using your own device.

How do I measure my blood pressure at home?

Your blood pressure [can vary](#) depending on whether you're talking, exercising or under stress, or if there is a change in the temperature. It can also vary depending on your posture, whether you've just eaten, taken medication, drunk a coffee or smoked.

So it's important to measure your blood pressure at home the [correct way each time](#), otherwise your readings might be incorrect or misleading:

- **use a validated device**, one that has been rigorously tested for accuracy. [Most devices](#) available in Australia have not been validated. You can check if yours is [here](#). Use an upper arm device (not a wrist cuff or one you wear on a wristband) with a correct cuff size (within the range indicated on the cuff). If you don't want to buy a device, you can hire or borrow one from some pharmacies and medical clinics
- **take measures at around the same time**, morning and evening, over seven days (five day minimum). Measure before taking medication, food or exercise, and as advised by your doctor (for instance, before visiting the doctor or after a medication change)
- **don't smoke or drink caffeine** 30 minutes before measuring, and don't measure if you're uncomfortable, stressed or in pain
- **sit quietly for five minutes** before measuring, without talking or distractions from other people or television
- **sit correctly**, with feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed, upper arm bare, arm supported with cuff at heart level, and back supported.
- **take two measures, one minute apart**
- **record each measure** in a [paper diary](#) or [electronic spreadsheet](#)
- **provide your doctor with your readings**, by email or via telehealth, such as videocalling.

Read more: What can you use a telehealth consult for and when should you physically visit your GP?

What else can I do to manage my blood pressure in lockdown?

While high blood pressure [is mainly caused](#) by unhealthy environments, lifestyles and behaviours, you can modify some of these at home to [lower your blood pressure](#), thus lowering the risk of heart disease.

[About 30%](#) of [high blood pressure](#) relates to eating too much salt, which can be [hidden in many foods](#).

A [balanced diet](#) low in salt, high in fruit, vegetables and wholegrains, as well as healthy proteins, can help control blood pressure and improve your overall heart health.

Being at home means you can prepare food from the basic ingredients, avoiding the high salt, fats and sugars found in processed foods.

Maintaining a [healthy weight](#) and having an [active life](#) with regular physical activity and decreased sitting time is good for your blood pressure and overall health.

Leaving the house for exercise is one of the few excuses you have available to you during lockdown.

People who regularly walk for as little as [15 minutes a day](#) are more likely to live longer than people who are inactive. That's irrespective of age, sex or risk of heart disease.

Limiting how much [alcohol you drink](#) and [quitting smoking](#) are also

important.

Still check in with your doctor

If your doctor starts you on medication to lower your blood pressure, this will [lower your risk](#) of a heart attack and stroke. So it's important to stick with your treatment while in isolation, unless instructed to stop.

Don't avoid a trip to your GP, or a telehealth consultation, should your [blood pressure](#) remain high.

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