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## **Blood Pressure (BP) Checks: What Can You Do?**

Blood pressure changes from time to time. It is usually lower when sleeping and higher when exercising or just after eating. It can also go up or down when you use certain medicines, herbs, street drugs or alcohol. One blood pressure reading is not enough to decide if you have high blood pressure.

### **Blood Pressure Checks**

When having your blood pressure checked, keep in mind the following things:

#### **What do the numbers mean?**

Normal blood pressure in anyone 18 or older is less than 120/80 (120 over 80).

Prehypertension is a condition that can lead to high blood pressure. Blood pressure readings between 120-139 (top number) or 80-89 (bottom number) is called prehypertension.

Hypertension or high blood pressure is 140 or higher for the top number or 90 or higher for the bottom number.

#### **For more information**

Call the Virginia Department of Health, Heart Disease at (804) 864-7871 or visit this web page: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/heart-disease>

This information was developed by the Virginia Department of Health's Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Project (HDSP).

- Do not smoke or have any caffeine for at least 30 minutes before having your blood pressure checked.

- Do not exercise or do any other tiring activities for at least 30 minutes before having your blood pressure checked (e.g., walking up the stairs).
- If needed, use the bathroom (urinate) before having your blood pressure checked.
- Tell your healthcare provider the names of all prescription drugs you are taking.
- Tell your healthcare provider the names of all over-the-counter medicines (including vitamins) and herbs that you take.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you are using any street drugs or drinking a lot of alcohol (for example: liquor, beer, or wine).
- Before your blood pressure is taken, rest for at least five minutes in a chair with:
  - support for your back
  - feet flat on the floor
  - your arm supported on a table
- Sit up straight - don't slouch. Don't lean on the arm that is being checked or on the blood pressure cuff or tubing.
- Your arm should be bare - the cuff should not be placed over a sleeve, even part way.
- Do not talk while your blood pressure is being checked.
- If you are told that your blood pressure is high and only one reading was taken, ask that it be taken again in the other arm.
- Ask for your readings, in writing.

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Virginia Department of Health

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<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov>

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