

The Thalidomide Trust

What is the best way of taking blood pressure in my patient with Thalidomide Embryopathy?

Many tThe Thalidomide Trust is aware that, for some thalidomide affected individuals, it may not be possible to take a blood pressure reading using the traditional cuff method in the upper arm due to shortening or absence of limbs. We are not aware of any other validated, alternative non-invasive method to date.

What can I do for my patient?

Blood pressure can be taken in the leg. The Trust are conducting research to understand the relationship between the blood pressure reading in the arm and that taken in the leg.

Ensure an accurate BP is taken and the cuff size snugly fits the part of the body chosen – otherwise change the cuff size and/or position on the body. In addition the part of the body where the cuff is placed must be at the same level as the heart e.g. raise the leg up while the individual reclines and wait 5 minutes.

For blood pressure taken in the leg -average sizes are a large cuff for a thigh, and a normal or small cuff for the calf and ankle are:

- 18-22cm small cuff
- 22-32cm standard cuff
- 32-45cm large cuff

Investigation

As we don't know what a target blood pressure should be in the leg, consider looking for end organ damage by examination of the fundi, urine tests for ACR and haematuria and ECG to look for LVH.

Referral

If cardiac risk cannot be determined please consider referral to Cardiology. Please see the section on 'Hypertension' for more information.

What self management strategies could I recommend?

- Ensure no caffeine or nicotine has been taken in the preceding 30 minutes prior to the blood pressure measurement
- Advise to visit the toilet prior to the measurement

Special Considerations

Difficulty undertaking phlebotomy may be an important consideration in choosing medications, for example, choosing drugs that don't require more frequent blood tests, like ACE inhibitors.

How can the Thalidomide Trust help?

The Thalidomide Trust has produced a video and leaflet on how to take blood pressure here;

<https://www.thalidomidetrust.org/health-and-wellbeing/health/health-appointments/blood-pressure/>

