

TAKING BLOOD PRESSURE FACTSHEET

Q What is blood pressure?

A Blood pressure refers to the pressure of the blood in the blood vessels as it's pumped around your body. Blood pressure readings are normally given as two numbers: one number over another, for example, 128 over 88 or 128/85. The first or top number is called the systolic blood pressure and relates to the pressure in your blood vessels when the heart contracts or pumps blood out. The second or bottom number is called the 'diastolic blood pressure' and refers to the blood pressure in your blood vessels when your heart relaxes or sucks blood into the heart.

Q Why do I need to check my blood pressure?

A A blood pressure check is the only way of seeing if your blood pressure is too high or too low. Often people with high blood pressure will have no symptoms at all and feel completely well. Having blood pressure readings that are too high put you at risk of heart disease and stroke and over time can start to damage your organs like your kidneys and your brain. Having a low blood pressure, particularly when you stand up, can put you more at risk of falls and faints.

Q What is normal blood pressure?

A As a general guide:

- "normal" blood pressure is between 90/60 and 120/80
- high blood pressure is 140/90 or higher
- Blood pressure readings between 120/80 and 140/90 could mean you're at risk of developing high blood pressure in the future
- low blood pressure is lower than 90/60

Blood pressure can be taken in either arm or the leg.

Q Is there a difference between the blood pressure readings in the arm and the leg?

A The Trust are conducting research to understand the relationship between the blood pressure reading in the arm and that taken in the leg. The blood pressure in your leg is different to the pressure in your arm but will still give an indication of whether your blood pressure is normal or raised. Your doctor will be able to interpret the readings for you.

Q If I want to, where can I buy a blood pressure monitor?

A Blood pressure monitors are available to buy in pharmacies and online, but be sure to buy a clinically validated monitor and the correct cuff size for the area it is to be used on. Information about this can be found at www.bloodpressureuk.org or www.bhsoc.org

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Average sizes are:

- a large cuff (for a thigh) - 32-45cm
- a standard cuff (for a calf or ankle) - 22-32cm
- a small cuff (for the ankle) - 18-22cm

If a larger size is needed, then contact the company supplying your blood pressure device.

Q How do I take blood pressure in the leg?



Note: taking your blood pressure can be a little painful or uncomfortable.

- A** Apply the blood pressure cuff around your thigh, calf or ankle. It does not matter which leg you use but continue to use the same one each time you take a reading. Using the ankle maybe less painful than the calf.

Ensure your leg is slightly raised by placing it on a pillow or cushion so that the cuff will be at approximately the same level as your heart.

Lie back and relax for a few moments with your head also on a pillow before switching on your automatic blood pressure monitor.

When you are taking your reading, keep still and silent. Moving and talking can affect your reading.

We recommend you take three readings about two minutes apart. Discard the first reading (which can be much higher than your real blood pressure), add the other two readings together and divide by 2 to get an average reading.

Record your reading either in the memory of your monitor if it has one, on a computer, or on paper.

You can watch the Trust's video on how to take blood pressure in the leg here: www.thalidomidetrust.org/health-and-wellbeing/health/health-appointments/blood-pressure/

If in doubt, talk to your doctor or contact the Trust.

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Q How often should I take my blood pressure?

- A** When and how often you take your readings will depend on your blood pressure reading. If you've been diagnosed with high or low blood pressure, speak to your doctor or nurse about what's suitable for you.

It can be useful to monitor your blood pressure closely to begin with, then less often but at regular intervals.

Q If I take blood pressure in my leg, how will this compare to a reading taken in my arm?

- A** If you wish to get an idea of what the blood pressure in your arm would be, take 15 off the top reading.

Q Is there anything else I should consider?

- A** Some beneficiaries are concerned that medication/drugs affect them more than other people. If you are concerned how any medication/drugs taken to lower your blood pressure may affect you, then please do discuss your concerns with your doctor. For example, an option might be to start with a lower dose of the drug to begin with. This will be better than not taking it at all.

If it is not easy for you to have a sample of blood taken, your doctor may want to choose a medication that does need regular blood tests so talk to your doctor about this if you have concerns.

Q Where can I get more information about blood pressure?

- A** You can find more information about blood pressure and what lifestyle measures you can do to reduce high blood pressure here: www.nhs.uk/conditions/high-blood-pressure-hypertension/treatment/

Q What if I've got other questions?

- A** Please contact the Health & Wellbeing Team for more information on **01480 474074** or email hello@thalidomidetrust.org