

1 Choosing the Right Doctor

An important first step in getting to your blood pressure goal is to find a doctor who may help you. But where do I start?

Here are some ideas:¹

- Ask a family member or a friend for suggestions.
- Ask your insurance company for a list of doctors.
- If you use the internet, you can find a doctor in your area. Log on to www.healthfinder.gov to access doctor finder web sites or other health resources.

Some other things to consider when choosing a doctor:

- Is the doctor's office easy to get to?
- What are the office hours?
- Does the doctor work alone or as part of a group? You might not always see the doctor you've chosen if he or she works with other doctors.
- Is the doctor a specialist in a certain area?
- Does the doctor accept my health insurance?

2 Getting Prepared for Your Appointment

Once you have chosen your doctor, get the most out of your doctor visit by being **prepared**. The more your doctor knows about you, the better your doctor can help you. And the more you learn during the appointment, the better you will be able to help yourself!

Getting Prepared Checklist²

- ✓ **Write down the date, time and location of your appointment.** Mark it in your calendar.
- ✓ **Ask the office staff what you should bring.** You may need to complete forms or send your health records ahead of time.
- ✓ **Bring a notebook and pen so you can write things down.**
- ✓ **Ask a family member or a friend to come with you.** This person can help you to ask questions. They can also assist you in remembering what the doctor told you.
- ✓ **Make a list of all of the medications you are taking and bring it with you to your appointment.**
- ✓ **Be prepared to tell your doctor about your symptoms.** The doctor may ask you when they started, or if they have gotten better or worse over time.
- ✓ **Write down your questions and concerns.** Some questions you may have are: What is my blood pressure goal? Will I need to take medicine? What foods should I eat? What foods should I avoid? How often will I need to return for a check-up?

3 During the Appointment: Working With Your Doctor

Have you ever left the doctor's office feeling unhappy with the visit? Maybe you forgot a question you wanted to ask? Or maybe you didn't understand something, but felt too afraid to ask the doctor to explain? **Here's what you can do to make your visit a good one:**³

- **Come prepared** - Bring all the information your doctor needs for the visit. This includes your health records and a list of medications.
- **Be honest** - Tell the doctor the truth about your health habits and lifestyle. For example, if you smoke or drink alcohol, say so. The more the doctor knows about you, the better he or she can help you.
- **Stick to the point** - A doctor's time may be limited. Tell your doctor why you are there. Give the most important information first.
- **Take notes** - You may remember your doctor's instructions better if you take notes. You might also ask a friend or family member to do this, so you can focus on listening.

- **Ask questions** - If the doctor uses words you don't understand, ask him or her to explain again using simpler words. You might also ask for information that you can take home and read at your own pace, such as a brochure, or find out about helpful web sites.
- **Speak up** - The doctor can't know what you're thinking or feeling unless you can talk about it. If you feel worried or stressed, let your doctor know.

4 After Your Doctor Visit

You've seen the doctor and you know what your blood pressure goal is. You also know the treatment plan. It is up to you now!

You need to follow the doctor's instructions to help get to your blood pressure goal. This may include a special eating plan, exercise, and medications.



Here's How the Plan Can Work to Help Get to Your Blood Pressure Goal:

- **Understand your treatment plan** - Do you know what you need to do to follow your doctor's instructions? If you still have questions when you get home, you can call the office and ask to speak to the nurse. Or if it can wait, write your questions down and bring them to your next visit.
- **Follow directions** - Try to follow your treatment plan exactly. It may be hard to make some changes. But you don't need to make them all at once. Start with small steps and try to do a little better each day.
- **Report back** - Your doctor will want you to return after your first visit to monitor how you are doing. Be ready for the next visit by writing things down and keeping track of your progress.