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EmPOWERED to Serve and Anthem Foundation

# **Managing Your Chronic Conditions During the COVID-19 Pandemic Program Toolkit**



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## TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

Thank you for participating in this EmPOWERED to Serve community lesson. This lesson is part of a collaboration between the American Heart Association and Anthem Foundation. Through our efforts, we're providing educational resources and tools to people most adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

This toolkit contains information and materials to educate your community organization, including:

- Key Messages
- Relevant Statistics and Graphs
- COVID-19 Overview
- Resources on Managing High Blood Pressure
- Information on Managing High Blood Sugar
- Community Resources
- Important Links and Assets

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## Key Messages

### The Why

Managing your conditions is always important, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly half of adults in the U.S. have high blood pressure — a major risk factor for heart attack and stroke and complications from COVID-19. Data



show conditions such as heart disease, hypertension and diabetes disproportionately affect Black and Latino people more than their White counterparts.

In addition, older adults are more likely to have severe illness with more than 95% of COVID related deaths occurring in those 45 years and older .

### About the COVID-19 Reimagine Response Initiative Strategy

The pandemic is transforming how health care is consumed and delivered. To REIMAGINE how we address these changes through a health equity lens, we must develop strategies to affect quality systems practices, health care professional and community education, and patient knowledge and skills.

With Anthem's support, we'll collaborate with clinics and community-based organizations for people at the highest risk for serious illness or complication from COVID-19. Anthem's investment will support AHA efforts to provide instructional materials, professional education and community outreach to enhance linkages between health care professionals and community-based organizations.

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## What conditions put me at risk for COVID-19?

Adults with underlying conditions such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, hypertension, or diabetes (type 1 or type 2) are at a much higher risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19.

Learning how to identify and self-monitor these conditions is important to taking control of your health and reducing your risk for COVID-19 and heart disease.

## Managing high blood pressure

High blood pressure, also referred to as HBP or hypertension, is when the force of blood flowing through your blood vessels is consistently too high. Your blood pressure is recorded as two numbers:

- The top number, systolic pressure, indicates how much pressure your blood exerts against your artery walls when the heart beats.
- The bottom number, diastolic pressure, indicates how much pressure your blood exerts against your artery walls while the heart is resting between beats.

This chart reveals the different blood pressure categories:

BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC mm Hg (upper number)		DIASTOLIC mm Hg (lower number)
NORMAL	LESS THAN 120	and	LESS THAN 80
ELEVATED	120-129	and	LESS THAN 80
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 1	130-139	or	80-89
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HYPERTENSION) STAGE 2	140 OR HIGHER	or	90 OR HIGHER
HYPERTENSIVE CRISIS (consult your doctor immediately)	HIGHER THAN 180	and/or	HIGHER THAN 120

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To get an accurate reading when self-measuring at home:

- You shouldn't smoke, drink caffeinated beverages or exercise within 30 minutes before measuring your blood pressure.
- Make sure your bladder is empty. A full bladder could lead to raised blood pressure temporarily.
- Make sure the cuff fits comfortably on your arm. If your cuff is too small, it can give a falsely high blood pressure reading. If your cuff is too large, it can and give a falsely low blood pressure reading.
- With the cuff secured on your bare arm, sit in an upright position with back supported, feet flat on the floor, legs uncrossed, and your arm supported at heart level. Make sure the bottom of the cuff is directly above the bend of the elbow.
- Relax for about five minutes before taking a measurement.



Some medications, including over-the-counter pain relievers called NSAIDs and common decongestants, can elevate blood pressure. Alcohol, caffeine, smoking, salt intake and stress can, too.

It's also important your device is from a validated list to ensure the most accurate reading.

Self-monitoring, along with a recommended treatment plan from your health care team, including lifestyle changes and, if needed, prescription medication, can help you manage your high blood pressure.

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## Managing high blood sugar

High blood sugar is another condition you can manage at home. Nearly 26 million adults in the U.S. have type 2 diabetes and many don't know it. The first step is to understand what makes blood sugar levels rise and how it correlates to diabetes.

- **Glucose:** The carbohydrates and sugars in food and drinks turn into glucose (sugar) in the small intestine and digestive system. Glucose can then enter the bloodstream.
- **Insulin:** The hormone is made in the pancreas and helps the body's cells take up glucose from blood and lower blood sugar levels.

Fasting Blood Glucose	Diagnosis	What It Means
Lower than 100 mg/dl	Normal	Healthy range
100 to 125 mg/dl	Prediabetes (Impaired Fasting Glucose)	At increased risk of developing diabetes.
126 mg/dl or higher	Diabetes Mellitus (type 2 diabetes)	At increased risk of developing heart disease or stroke.

There are two types of diabetes:

- Type 1 diabetes develops when the body's immune system attacks and destroys cells that make insulin in the pancreas. People with type 1 diabetes must take insulin or medication daily.
- Type 2 diabetes is when glucose builds up in the blood instead of going into cells because:
  - The body develops "insulin resistance" and can't use the insulin it makes efficiently.
  - The pancreas gradually loses its ability to produce insulin.

The result can be a high blood glucose level. Type 2 diabetes, about 90-95% of cases, is most common and can often be controlled with diet and exercise.

If you have type 2 diabetes, you'll need to monitor your blood sugar level regularly. This can be done at home with a glucose monitor.

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Prediabetes, meaning you have higher than average blood sugar, has no clear symptoms. But people with type 1 or type 2 diabetes may have symptoms or mild symptoms that go unnoticed or are attributed to something else. It's important to be aware of these warning signs and contact your health care professional if you have any of these symptoms for a checkup:

Type 1 Diabetes	Type 2 Diabetes
Increased or extreme thirst	Increased thirst
Increased appetite	Increased appetite
Increased fatigue	Fatigue
Increased or frequent urination	Increased urination, especially at night
Unusual weight loss	Weight loss
Blurred vision	Blurred vision
Fruity odor or breath	Sores that don't heal
In some cases, no symptoms	In some cases, no symptoms

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends you be tested for diabetes if you're:

- Over age 45
- Overweight, younger than 45 and have one or more additional risk factors, such as:
  - High blood pressure
  - High cholesterol
  - Family history of diabetes
  - African American, Asian American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American or Pacific Islander
  - History of gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy) or delivering a baby more than 9 pounds

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Small changes in your diet and lifestyle can help you take control of these conditions. Understanding risk factors that contribute to high blood pressure and diabetes can help you be more aware of how likely you are to develop them.

### Non-modifiable risks

- Family history
- Increased age
- Male gender
- Race

### Modifiable risks

You can change these risk factors to help prevent and manage high blood pressure and high blood sugar:

- Lack of physical activity
- Unhealthy diet
- Being overweight or obese
- Drinking too much alcohol
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Smoking and tobacco use
- Stress



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## Going back to your doctor

A key factor in managing your condition is regular visits with a health care professional. During the pandemic, many people have avoided routine checkups with their doctors. But it's important to take control of your health and well-being.



Take the first step and call your doctor's office to schedule an appointment. Be sure to ask about in-office safety precautions so you're prepared.

Some doctors are still offering telehealth visits for those who would rather stay home. Many medications can also be prescribed through telehealth.

## COVID-19 vaccine

The best way for people to protect themselves against COVID-19 is to get the vaccine. People with cardiovascular risk factors, diabetes, heart disease or a history of heart attack or stroke are among those with the highest risk of developing complications from the virus.

Getting the vaccine is safe, effective and can also protect those around you. It's also important to follow recommendations about physical distancing, hand-washing, wearing face coverings and other practices that can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

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## CALL TO ACTION

Whether it's self-monitoring at home or receiving the vaccine, managing your conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic is important.

Take these steps to put you and your health first.



### Use your voice to create healthier communities.

You can help us draw communities together to build a sustainable culture of health. Go to [EmPOWEREDtoServe.org](https://www.EmPOWEREDtoServe.org), sign up to become an ambassador and learn how you can be a part of an effort to improve the health of ALL in our communities.

We all have the power to make a difference by speaking out for policies that help build healthier communities and lives. Text **EMPOWER** to **46839** today to join You're the Cure and be among the first to know when major policy initiatives pass or to advocate for a healthy future.

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## **We are EmPOWERED to Serve**

We appreciate your thoughts!  
Tell us what you liked best.  
Email us at [empoweredtoserve@heart.org](mailto:empoweredtoserve@heart.org).

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## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **American Heart Association**

- Blood pressure toolkit (physician and patient resources): <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/high-blood-pressure-toolkit-resources>
- Diabetes tools and resources: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/diabetes/diabetes-tools--resources>

### **Validated Blood Pressure Devices Listing**

- <https://www.validatebp.org/>

### **Target:BP**

- Best practices and guidelines: <https://targetbp.org/guidelines17/>
- Measuring accurately: <https://targetbp.org/blood-pressure-improvement-program/control-bp/measure-accurately/>

### **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**

- <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/high-blood-pressure>

### **British and Irish Hypertension Society**

- List of validated devices: <https://bihsoc.org/bp-monitors/>

### **U.S. Department of Agriculture**

- The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension Eating (DASH) Plan: <https://www.nutrition.gov/topics/diet-and-health-conditions/high-blood-pressure>

### **American Diabetes Association**

- Blog articles about diabetes: <https://www.diabetes.org/blog>
- Prescription and health insurance guidance: <https://www.diabetes.org/resources/health-insurance>

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### Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists

- Glucose monitoring: <https://www.diabeteseducator.org/living-with-diabetes/Tools-and-Resources/blood-glucose-monitoring>
- Understanding insulin injections: <https://www.diabeteseducator.org/living-with-diabetes/Tools-and-Resources/insulin-injection-resources>

### YMCA

- Diabetes prevention program: <https://www.ymca.org/what-we-do/healthy-living/fitness/diabetes-prevention>

### Center for Disease Control and Prevention

- Diabetes Prevention Program Finder: [https://nccd.cdc.gov/DDT\\_DPRP/Registry.aspx](https://nccd.cdc.gov/DDT_DPRP/Registry.aspx)
- COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunizations Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/index.html>
- Find COVID-19 vaccination sites by zip code: <https://www.vaccines.gov/>

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