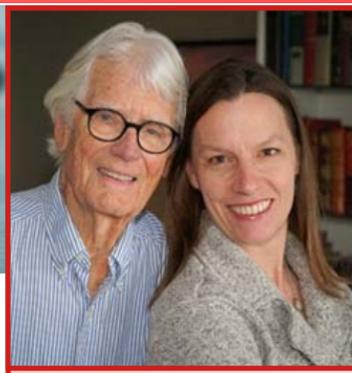


HEALTH CORNER



The Doctor Game How Accurate Is Your Blood Pressure Reading?

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Having your blood pressure taken during an annual checkup is always part of the routine. In fact, compared to CT scans and MRI procedures used to detect complex problems, most people don't give blood pressure readings much thought. As long as the doctor reports normal readings, there's no reason for concern. But have you ever wondered if your blood pressure reading is accurate?

Multiple studies have shown that 15 to 30 percent of those who have elevated blood pressure in a doctor's office or other health care setting have normal blood pressure when checked at home. It is not shocking news. You must be a pretty cool patient not to be somewhat uptight in medical offices. There is always the concern the doctor will have bad news. What may be a surprise is that there are 19 requirements to obtain a true blood pressure reading! How many of these measures are followed in a busy doctor's office?

For instance, patients are required to sit for five minutes before a blood pressure reading is taken with back supported and feet flat on the ground. This means that perching on an examining table with feet dangling is a no, no. So is crossing your legs. Never place the cuff over clothing. And at least two measurements should be taken during the visit, with the average being recorded.

Patients should also relax and breath normally. Smoking before the test, consuming caffeine, or exercising all forbidden before a blood pressure reading. And if you are on hypertensive medication, don't take it just before the visit to the doctor's office. Another important no-no which you may not have considered is that blood pressure must not be taken when you have a full bladder. So, have the courage to say, "Doctor, before you take my blood pressure, could you wait for a few minutes so I can use the bathroom?"

What about the blood pressure cuff? A cuff that is too small or large can cause an unreliable reading. So can a cuff that is too tight or not tight enough. Your arm should be resting on a table roughly the height of your heart while blood pressure is being taken. A series of readings over time are more accurate if taken at the same time of the day in a similar context.

Do you still have blind confidence in your blood pressure readings? If you have been prescribed blood pressure medication, do you need it? Or was the diagnosis the result of "white-coat hypertension"?

If these basic blood pressure requirements are not filled during a medical examination, patients left with a quandary. It requires a strong personality to say to the nurse or doctor, "I'm worried this may be not an accurate blood pressure reading because you failed to follow the standard procedures." It's not the best way to engender good relations between doctor and patient. So, what else can be done?

For anyone taking blood pressure drugs, it's prudent to purchase an automatic digital blood pressure monitor. These are more accurate than the traditional manual devices used in offices that require a squeeze of the rubber bulb to inflate the cuff. All you have to do with a digital device is to wrap the cuff around the arm, push the button to inflate the cuff, and in a few moments, you have the result.

Now it's easy to say, "Doctor my digital cuff says my blood pressure is consistently 130/80 when I am at home. Maybe I just have white coat hypertension."

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Q My girlfriend Jessie and I were together four years. Recently, she went on a two-week family holiday. During those two weeks, I went for a night out with my work colleagues. I got extremely drunk and kissed a girl from work.

I felt guilty the next day, but a few days later I told my friends, who are also her friends, that I wanted to break up with her. I didn't, but I was confused at the time.

The following Saturday, she came home. We went out that night, and I was so confused I told her we should break up. She thought I was playing games.

She left the pub, and I followed. I told her, "I met somebody else." I shouldn't have said it that way, as I did not meet another girl. I just kissed her. It was the biggest mistake of my life.

Over the next few weeks I tried contacting Jessie, but she would not answer her phone or reply to my texts. In the end, sometimes after work I drank too much and sent her text messages, some of which I'm not proud of.

Because I was hassling her, she changed her phone number. I met up with her a few weeks later, and she talked to me for 20 minutes. She said we may be friends again, but that will be it.

I was with Jessie four years, and we had a great relationship. I know we had our arguments, but every couple has arguments. The problem is, sometimes when we went out drinking, I would humiliate her about her weight, her makeup, or something else.

I know I screwed up. I used to mess with her clothes when we were out in the pub, for example, lifting up her skirt, but that's just me messing around.

I have seen her a few times since we broke up. I send her a letter every week begging or groveling to give me a second chance. I know the mistakes I made and would not make them again.

When I called Jessie's house last Saturday, she wasn't in. She rang me 30 minutes later and asked why I was still writing to her. I asked, could we meet up for a coffee?, but she said she didn't want to as I would cry into my coffee, which is what happened last time.

She says she is happy, and if she went back with me, she would go backwards. She said the next time she sees me in the street, she might say hello or she might not. My heart inside was crushed. Is there anything I can do to get Jessie back?

Robert

A Robert, how is this a mistake?
You kissed a girl in a bar. Perhaps you had too much to drink, but you weren't drunk when you told mutual friends you wanted to break up. And when you broke up with Jessie in a pub, you said you had someone else.

That's three "mistakes" in a row. That shows intent. What you didn't tell us is what you were trying to gain. Did you want to make her jump through hoops to get you back? Were you paying her back for an imagined sleight? We don't know. But she did not come crawling back, you did not get makeup sex, and your plan went awry.

Often with letters like yours, the letter writer thinks they could do better. But the way you went about it, made it impossible for her to take you back. It would make her the beggar in the relationship.

She did what we would have told her to do, had she written us. Don't take calls from him; don't let him whisper in your ear; don't let him wheedle his way back in. You say you were confused, but you staged such a convincing show it was believed by all. Now you claim it was only an act, but what a great act it was. The audience applauded wildly, and you took a curtain call.

Your letter is about how you didn't get what you wanted, not about how you injured her. All your sorry is for yourself. Why are you concealing why you did it? Because it is not something you can say out loud.

This was the classic breakup intended to hurt, and she was the last to know. You sealed the deal with a kiss. If you can't be honest with us, at least be honest with yourself.

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