

[IMAGE]

Folding under Pressure

Many people (and their kids) flock to the free blood pressure-measuring machines in their local supermarkets or discount stores. These devices are widely available to the general population, and may help enhance people's involvement with their own healthcare. But just how accurate are they?

A recent study in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* compared the validity of three blood-pressure recording devices: a standard automated device that has circulated publicly since 1990, a similar but clinically validated device, and a sphygmomanometer (the hand-held device that doctors use to measure your blood pressure) operated by a qualified researcher. The effectiveness of each method was determined in approximately 100 adults, based on Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI) standards.

Neither of the automated devices met the AAMI accuracy requirements for systolic blood pressure. Also, neither machine was as accurate in a community setting as in a laboratory. Based on their findings, the authors of the study concluded that reliance on these devices could result in "an inaccurate or missed diagnosis of hypertension."

There are no published minimum standards for blood-pressure measuring devices created for use in the community. Don't rely on grocery-store devices to determine your true blood pressure. Have a qualified physician accurately take your blood pressure on a regular basis using a sphygmomano... well, you know - the one they wrap around your arm and pump by hand.

Reference:

Lewis JE, Boyle E, Magharious L, et al. Evaluation of a community-based automated blood pressure measuring device. *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 2002;166(9), pp. 1145-1148.

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