Effective provider-patient communication improves health and saves time. Use this checklist as a guide during visits with patients working to control high blood pressure.

- Explain roles of members of the health care team.
- Ask, “What is most important for you to accomplish during your visit today?” The answer helps set the agenda.
- Review blood pressure goal against current reading(s).
- Have an open conversation about goals, achievements, confidence, and barriers. See sidebar for some examples.
- Help set small, achievable goals based on patients’ answers. For example, if the patient is working to improve diet, establish a goal to swap out favorite food items for lower-sodium versions. This can build over time to more heart-healthy meals, cooked at home.
- Use the “Ask-Tell-Ask” technique to address actions for each behavioral goal:
  - Ask permission to provide information on a specific topic. For example, for medication adherence, you might say, “There are several things I want to tell you about your new medication. Is that okay?”
  - Tell the patient what they need to know (e.g., when they should take the medication, expected side effects, importance of taking it as directed). Use simple words and diagrams or pictures.
  - Ask the patient to repeat back the information in his or her own words.
- Provide the patient with the following tools:
  - Blood pressure tracker with target numbers written prominently
  - Home blood pressure monitoring instructions—review this helpful guide
  - Healthy diet information
  - Community options for exercising
  - Support groups to join
- Remind the patient to record blood pressure readings between office visits and share with the team by phone, fax, or e-mail as well as at the next office visit.

Questions to Ask
Consider using these to get a discussion going:

- What have you been doing since our last visit to control your blood pressure?
- What concerns you the most about your high blood pressure?
- What specifically would you like to work on to manage your high blood pressure?
- How confident are you that you could do [behavior] to help control your blood pressure?
- What might get in the way or keep you from being successful?
- What do you think would make it easier to control your high blood pressure?

Million Hearts® is a national initiative to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes by 2017. It is led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, two agencies of the Department of Health and Human Services.

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Tools and Resources

- American Medical Group Foundation’s Provider Toolkit to Improve Hypertension Control includes printable assessments for patients around goal-setting and assessing self-management knowledge (see pages 49 and 51).
- California Health Care Foundation’s Helping Patients Manage Their Chronic Conditions guide further discusses the “Ask-Tell-Ask” approach as well as motivational interviewing and goal-setting.
- Visit the Million Hearts® website for more information and resources for helping patients control hypertension.