



your health & well-being

Know Your Health Numbers, And What They Mean

Do you know how healthy you are, or what your risk areas may be? A good way to understand your health status – if you are healthy, low-risk, medium-risk, or high-risk – is to know your numbers, and the effect those numbers have on your well-being.

Blood Pressure

Your blood pressure reading consists of two numbers:

- The **systolic measurement**, the first or top number of a blood pressure reading, is the pressure of blood against your artery walls when the heart has just finished contracting and pumping out blood.
- The **diastolic measurement**, the second or bottom number in a blood pressure reading, is the pressure of blood against your artery walls between heartbeats when the heart is relaxed and filling with blood.

Based on these measurements:

- High blood pressure (hypertension) is 140/90 or higher;
- Pre-hypertension is 120-139/80-89; and
- Normal blood pressure is 119/79 or lower.

High blood pressure (also called hypertension) can increase your risk of having a heart attack, stroke or kidney failure. According to the American Heart Association, you should have your blood pressure checked at least once every two years if you are in the normal range.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol travels through the blood attached to a protein. This package of cholesterol (a lipid) and protein is called a lipoprotein. Lipoproteins are either high-density or low-density, based on how much protein and fat they have.

- Low-density lipoproteins (LDL) are the “bad” cholesterol. LDL is mostly fat with only a small amount of protein. It can clog your arteries. If you have high cholesterol, your doctor will want you to lower your LDL.
- High-density lipoproteins (HDL) are the “good” cholesterol. HDL is more protein than fat. It helps clear the bad cholesterol from your blood so it does not clog your arteries. A high level of HDL can protect you from a heart attack.
- Triglycerides are another type of fat in the blood that can affect your health. If you have high triglycerides and high LDL, your chances of having a heart attack are higher.

It may help to think of HDL as the “Healthy” cholesterol and LDL as the “Lousy” cholesterol. Or you could remember that the HDL number should be High and LDL number should be Low. Experts have developed optimal levels for each type of cholesterol. Compare your numbers to these targets:

- LDL should be less than 100. LDL increases your risk of heart problems, so the lower your LDL, the better. A level of 160 or above is high.
- HDL should be more than 40. HDL over 60 helps protect against a heart attack. HDL below 40 increases your risk of heart problems. The higher your HDL, the better. A high HDL number can help offset a high LDL number.
- Triglycerides should be less than 150. A level above 150 may increase your risk for heart problems.

If your cholesterol level is high, you may be at risk for heart disease. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that you have a cholesterol screening every five years, starting at age 20.

BMI

To find out if your weight level is healthy, calculate your body mass index (BMI). This measurement takes both your weight and height into consideration.

To get your BMI, follow these steps:

- Multiply your weight x 703.
- Divide the result by your height in inches.
- Divide this number by your height in inches again. You are at a healthy weight if the final number is between 18.5 and 24.9. If the final number is 25 or higher, you should consider losing weight.

Waist Measurement

If your BMI is elevated, the next step is to measure your waist. To do this, run a tape measure around your body at the level of your belly button. You may be at increased risk for health problems if you are:

- A man with a waist measurement greater than 40 in. (101.6 cm).
- A woman with a waist measurement greater than 35 in. (88.9 cm).

Putting it all together

If you are unsure of your numbers, schedule an appointment with your doctor to measure these critical health indicators. Be sure to talk to your doctor about these and other screenings that may be right for you based on your age, gender, and family history.

Source: Healthwise®, CIGNA Well-Being



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