

PSA In Good Health: Knowing Your Health Numbers

What does your doctor mean when he/she says you should know your numbers? And why is it important? Your doctor means that you should know your blood pressure, blood glucose, cholesterol, and triglyceride numbers, as well as your body mass index. Knowing these numbers is important because keeping your numbers within a healthy range can greatly reduce your risk for developing heart disease, diabetes, or other chronic diseases. Here's a quick rundown of those important numbers.

BLOOD PRESSURE

Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. If it's too high, your heart must work harder. Over time, high blood pressure can cause the heart to enlarge or weaken. This can lead to heart failure. High blood pressure can also narrow your arteries, which disrupts proper blood flow to your heart or brain, triggering a heart attack or stroke.



Healthy target:
Less than 120/80 mm Hg

The top or first number is the systolic number; it measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats. A normal systolic number is less than 120. The bottom or second number is the diastolic number; it measures the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats. It should be less than 80.

BLOOD GLUCOSE

Your body breaks down food into glucose (a type of sugar), which cells absorb for energy. When this process isn't working right, glucose builds up in the blood. Extra sugar in your bloodstream is a sign of diabetes, a disease that can harm every organ in your body and also damage nerves and blood vessels.



Healthy target: A normal fasting (no food for eight hours) blood sugar level is between 70 and 99 mg/dL.

CHOLESTEROL

Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in your body's cells. It helps your body make important vitamins and hormones. But too much cholesterol can lead to plaque buildup inside your blood vessels. This sticky substance causes your arteries to harden and narrow, which limits blood flow to your heart.



Healthy targets:
Total cholesterol—Less than 200 mg/dL total.

LDL—low density lipoprotein or “bad” cholesterol less than 100 mg/dL.

HDL—high density lipoprotein or “good” cholesterol, men greater than 40 mg/dL and women greater than 50 mg/dL.

TRIGLYCERIDES

Triglycerides, which are produced in the liver, are another type of fat found in the blood and in food. Causes of elevated triglycerides are obesity, physical inactivity, cigarette smoking, excess alcohol intake, and a diet very high in carbohydrates (60 percent of calories or higher). A triglyceride level of 150 mg/dL or higher can increase your risk for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.



Healthy target:
Less than 150 mg/dL

BODY MASS INDEX (BMI)

Your BMI is a weight-height calculation that can help determine if you're overweight or obese. Excess body fat increases your risk for a wide range of health problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and sleep apnea.



Healthy target: 18.5 to 24.9

SO...

When was the last time you had a routine physical exam and had your numbers checked?

If it's been a while, contact your primary care doctor to schedule an appointment. Routine physical exams and related blood work are covered in full by your health plan when you use in-network providers.

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