WLG 205

WestVirginiaUniversity
EXTENSION SERVICE

Know Your Numbers to Count on Good Health

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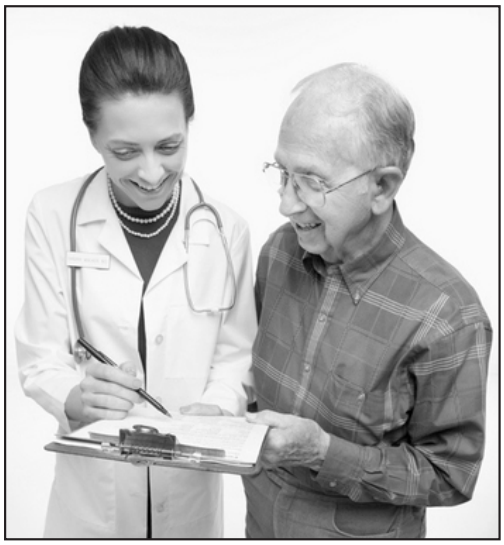
Educational Objectives

1. Learn which health facts are most critical to your lifelong health.
2. Know target numbers and normal ranges.
3. Prepare questions to get the most out of visits with your health care providers.



Many of us rely on health care providers to explain things and track our numbers. However, it is YOUR health and YOUR responsibility. Being in the know about your personal health will allow you to more confidently manage daily health decisions.

Learn about the health risks passed to you from your family by gathering information on your family history. List your close relatives (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings), their health conditions, and causes of death. Share the list with your health care provider, and ask them to explain any family-related health risks.

Five Important Health Numbers

Ask participants, "Can you guess the five numbers you must know for good health?"

- Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Blood pressure
- Blood glucose or sugar
- Cholesterol
- Triglycerides

1. **Body Mass Index (BMI)** is calculated using your weight and height. It is a reliable way to measure body fat for most people. To check your BMI, ask your health care provider or use a BMI calculator (see *www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/*). A high BMI can put you at risk for serious health problems and diseases.

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BMI	Weight Status	
Below 18.5	Underweight	High BMI is common, yet serious. Manage your BMI, and your other numbers will likely improve, too.
18.5 – 24.9	Normal	
25.0 – 29.9	Overweight	
30.0 and above	Obese	

More than 60 percent of U.S. women are overweight and one third of those are obese. To lose weight and lower your BMI, make a plan to eat nutrient-rich foods and increase your daily physical activity.

2. **High blood pressure**, or hypertension, increases the risks of heart attack and stroke. Blood pressure is the force of blood against the artery walls. There are two important numbers in a blood pressure reading:
   1. The top number is the systolic pressure when the heart beats to pump blood into your arteries.
   2. The bottom number, or diastolic, is the pressure in the arteries when the heart is at rest between beats.

High blood pressure can happen to anyone at any age. There are often no symptoms of high blood pressure. The only way to know you have it is to get your blood pressure checked.

Blood Pressure Range	Blood Pressure Status	
Below 120/80	Normal	Talk to your health care provider about ways to manage your blood pressure.
120/80 to 139/89	Prehypertension	
140/90 to 159/99	Stage 1 hypertension	
160/100	Stage 2 hypertension	

One in three U.S. adults (74 million people) have high blood pressure. Only about half of those control it. One in five U.S. adults with high blood pressure do not know they have it, resulting in 1,000 deaths every day.

3. **Blood glucose** is the amount of glucose, or sugar, in the blood. Your body changes carbohydrate-rich foods into glucose for the body's main energy source. Glucose enters the blood and circulates to all the cells. For glucose to enter cells, it needs insulin that is released by the pancreas. However, if your body does not make enough insulin or the insulin does not work right, glucose does not get into the cells. It stays in the blood making your glucose level high, which results in diabetes. There are three types of diabetes:
   - ***Type 1 diabetes*** is a lifelong condition in which the pancreas does not make insulin so it must be taken every day.
   - ***Type 2 diabetes*** is when the body makes insulin, but the insulin does not do its job getting glucose into the cells. Nine out of ten people with diabetes have type 2.
   - ***Gestational diabetes*** happens in 1 out of 20 pregnancies.

Talk with your health care provider about your risks, as well as when and how often you need a test.

Blood Glucose Categories	Blood Glucose Tests	
	Fasting	**Random (not fasting)**
Normal	70 to 99	80 to 120 before meals/waking up 100 to 140 at bedtime
Prediabetes (high risk for type 2 diabetes)	100 to 125	
Diabetes	126 and over	

If diagnosed with prediabetes or diabetes, it is critical to make lifestyle changes. If not

controlled, type 1 and 2 diabetes can lead to heart disease, stroke, blindness, nerve damage, and amputations. While gestational diabetes usually goes away when the pregnancy is over, it raises the risk of birth defects in the baby and puts the mother at a higher risk of type 2 diabetes later in life.

4. **Cholesterol** is a waxy substance in the blood needed to build cells and make hormones. Your liver makes all the cholesterol needed, but you also get it from foods. Too much cholesterol builds up in your arteries, leading to heart attack and stroke. High blood cholesterol has no symptoms, so the only way to know if you have this condition is to have it checked. Beginning at age 20, a blood cholesterol check should be done every five years. Tests should start earlier for individuals with family history of heart disease. For an accurate test, fast for 9 to 12 hours beforehand.

Blood Cholesterol Categories	Ranges	High cholesterol is a serious health threat that is preventable with healthy lifestyle habits.
Normal	Less than 200	
Borderline-high	200 to 239	
High	240 and above	

Total cholesterol is the sum of two types of cholesterol in your blood: LDL and HDL.

- ***LDL*** is low-density lipoprotein. This "lousy" or "bad" cholesterol clogs arteries. For LDL, lower numbers are best. Aim for an LDL less than 100.
- ***HDL*** is high-density lipoprotein. It is the "healthy" or "good" cholesterol that takes LDL out of your blood, keeping cholesterol from building up and clogging arteries. Aim for an HDL number higher than 60.

People with high cholesterol are twice as likely to develop heart disease and are at a greater risk for stroke.

5. **Triglycerides** are another type of fat in your blood. When you eat, your body turns the calories it does not use into triglycerides that are stored in your fat cells. If you eat too many calories, it can lead to a high triglyceride level.

Triglyceride Categories	Ranges	High triglycerides are often a sign of other problems. A high level may also result from taking certain medications.
Normal	Less than 150	
Borderline-high	150 to 199	
High	200 to 499	
Very high	500 and above	

Keep Your Numbers in a Healthy Range

In addition to knowing your health numbers, knowing how to keep them in the healthy target range is even more important. Control your numbers by controlling your daily health habits.

1. Be active.
   - Every day, aim for 30 minutes of activity. No time for a 30-minute exercise break? Fit in 10-minute activity bursts.
2. Eat and drink wisely.
   - Choose foods rich in nutrients and fiber.
   - Cut extra calories that lead to a high BMI and high triglycerides.
   - Avoid sugary foods, which are processed and made with white flour.
   - Limit high cholesterol foods, such as fatty meats, egg yolks, and whole milk products.
   - Choose healthier fats. Use oils from plants (olive, peanut, and canola). Eat cold water fish, like salmon and mackerel.
   - Eliminate trans-fat. Avoid fried and baked goods and anything containing partially hydrogenated oil.

– Lower the salt and sodium in your diet. Take the salt shaker off the table. Compare sodium on food labels. Eat less canned and processed foods.
– Rethink your drink. Sugary drinks are full of calories, acids, and artificial ingredients.
– Alcohol has high calories, sugar, and no nutrients. Even small amounts can raise triglyceride and HDL levels.

3. Avoid tobacco.
   – Do not use tobacco products.
   – Stay away from secondhand smoke.
4. Cope with stress.
   – Stress leads to overeating, inactivity, smoking, and other unhealthy habits.
   – Tune in to your daily stresses by identifying factors that cause stress.
   – Try healthy ways to cope: deep breathing, meditation, journaling, walking, etc.

Ask participants to check on their handout:

- Which of these healthy lifestyle habits do you already do?
- To improve your health numbers, which do you plan to work on?
- Which do you want to talk about with your health care provider?

Make a Personal Plan with Your Health Care Provider

Make a personal plan with your health care provider to keep your numbers in a healthy range. Be sure to ask these questions:

1. What is my main health concern?
2. What can I do to manage or prevent it?
3. Do I need any tests? Why?
4. Are there any treatments you recommend? Why?
5. How often do I need a checkup or follow-up test?

Resources

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office on Women's Health, *www.womenshealth.gov*, 1-800-994-9662.

American Heart Association, *www.heart.org*.

www.webmd.com

diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/km/pubs/diagnosis

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