

## Do You Know Your Heart Numbers?

Knowing your blood pressure, cholesterol, body fat, and even your CRP can go a long way toward preventing the No. 1 killer.

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*WebMD Feature*

Your PIN number, your password. You can't operate without them.

Add **high blood pressure**, **cholesterol**, and **body fat** to that list, too. You can't live without those numbers -- literally.

High numbers = high odds of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

Some risk is inherited. But much is linked to things you can change -- like bad diet, smoking, and a sedentary lifestyle.

"Walking is perfectly fine," Michael Crouch, MD, a family and community medicine specialist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, tells WebMD. "Anything is better than nothing, but 30 minutes a day is what we recommend."

To better understand your heart numbers, here are the basics:

### **C-Reactive Protein**

This is new on the heart numbers list. Researchers have identified this protein as a marker for heart disease and stroke -- even in kids.

They don't fully understand the relationship between C-reactive protein (CRP) and heart disease, but it's a sign of inflammation in the blood vessels.

Getting your CRP checked is not yet a routine recommendation. However, more and more doctors are using it to help identify people who may be at an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

Numbers to worry about:

- **1.0 and less is considered normal.**
- **1.0 to 3.0 mg/dL is increased risk.**
- **3.0 to 10.0 mg/dL is high risk.**

"If you have a family history of heart disease, without a lot of other risk factors, you may have high C-reactive protein -- you may have inherited it," Crouch says.

### **Blood Pressure**

One of the strongest markers for heart disease is measured in two numbers - your blood pressure. You hear the numbers, but do you know what they mean?

The first or top number is **systolic** blood pressure -- the pressure of blood against artery walls during a heartbeat, when the heart is pumping blood.

The second number is **diastolic** blood pressure - the pressure of blood against artery walls between heartbeats, when the heart is filling with blood.

- Normal blood pressure is **119/79 mmHg or below**.
- Pre-hypertension is **120 to 139 (systolic) and/or 80 to 89 (diastolic) mmHg**.

Do these numbers seem a bit lower than you remember? What's considered a normal blood pressure was redefined in May of 2003 when guidelines were revised to include a new category -- prehypertension.

Experts recommend that people with prehypertension -- an estimated 45 million men and women -- make heart-healthy lifestyle changes to reduce their risk of blood pressure complications, such as heart disease, stroke, and kidney damage.

### **Cholesterol**

Probably the most familiar heart disease risk factor, cholesterol is a type of fat that is an essential nutrient for your body. However, too much cholesterol - or not enough of the good type of cholesterol -- floating around in your blood increases your risk for hardening of the arteries that can lead to heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

Cholesterol is considered abnormal when:

- **Total** cholesterol is **200 mg/dL or higher**.
- **HDL** or "good" cholesterol level is **less than 40 mg/dL**
- **LDL** or "bad" cholesterol is **160 mg/dL or higher -- with 190 and above being very high**. However, the lower the LDL, the better. An LDL less than 100 is considered optimal; 100 to 129 is near optimal; 130 to 159 is borderline high.

### **Body Mass Index (BMI)**

This is an indicator of your body fat, a quick way to see if you are overweight. BMI may be overestimated in people with a lot of muscle mass, such as body builders.

BMI uses a person's weight and height to gauge total body fat. You can use this handy chart to [easily estimate your BMI](#).

- **A BMI of 24 or less** is ideal.
- **A BMI of 25 to 30** is overweight.
- **A BMI of 30 to 39** indicates obesity.
- **A BMI over 40** indicates morbid obesity, which increases a person's risk of death from any cause by 50% to 150%, according to The Cleveland Clinic.

### **Type 2 Diabetes**

Overweight and too little exercise -- that's what greatly increases the risk of type 2 diabetes. It's nothing to take lightly because it can lead to heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and even blindness.

A fasting blood sugar test -- after not eating or drinking anything but water for at least 12 hours -- is most commonly used to diagnose type 2 diabetes.

- A **normal** fasting blood sugar is **less than 100 mg/dL**.
- **Prediabetes** is a fasting blood sugar of **100 to 125 mg/dL**.
- A fasting blood sugar of **126 mg/dL** or greater indicates **diabetes**.

"The bottom line is, take it seriously," says Crouch.