

# keep track of your health

If you're feeling healthy, going to the doctor may be the furthest thing from your mind. But even if you feel terrific, it's important to have a regular checkup so that you and your doctor can keep track of some crucial health indicators. Four of the most important to know are your blood pressure, total cholesterol, body mass index, and blood sugar.

Keeping tabs on these numbers helps you spot the early warning signs of serious conditions like heart disease and diabetes. And if you're healthy, they give you a good basis to compare – yourself against in future checkups.

## Here's what these numbers mean, and why they're are so important to your health

### Blood pressure

Your blood pressure shows how hard your heart is working to pump blood through your body. If it's high, it means your heart is working too hard. Left untreated, high blood pressure (or "hypertension") can damage your arteries, heart, and other organs, and increase your risk of heart attack, stroke, heart failure, and other serious conditions.

High blood pressure is particularly dangerous, because it usually has no symptoms. An estimated one in three American adults has hypertension, and one-third of them aren't even aware of their condition, according to the American Heart Association.

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**Normal:** Below 120/80    **High:** 140/90 or above

### Total cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found in your bloodstream and all your body's cells. Having too much greatly increases your risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke, so it's important to have your levels checked regularly.

A blood cholesterol test tells you about the amounts and types of cholesterol – good and bad – in your bloodstream, measured in milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dL). Total cholesterol measures a combination of all the types of cholesterol in your blood.

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**Desirable (lower risk):** Less than 200 mg/dL

**Borderline high (higher risk):** 200 to 239 mg/dL

**High (more than twice the desirable level risk):** 240 mg/dL and above

### Body mass index

Your body mass index (BMI) is a gauge of your body weight relative to your height. It measures excess weight, which is important because extra pounds increase the strain on your heart. Carrying extra weight also raises your blood pressure, LDL (bad) cholesterol, and triglyceride levels, and lowers HDL (good) cholesterol levels.

Having a BMI of 25 or above makes you more likely to develop heart disease, stroke and diabetes – and the higher your BMI, the greater your risk.

One thing to note: Although BMI gives a good estimate of body fat for most people, it may not be so accurate if you're very athletic/muscular, or you're pregnant or breastfeeding.

### Blood glucose

Blood sugar, or blood glucose, is your body's primary source of energy. But if you have too much, it puts you at increased risk for developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

A blood glucose test shows the amount of glucose in your blood, measured in milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL).

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**Healthy:** 65 to 99 mg/dL

**Pre-diabetes:** 100 to 125 mg/dL

**Type 2 diabetes:** 126 or more

### Call your doctor

Checking your numbers with a regular exam is an important part of staying healthy. So if you haven't seen your doctor for a while, make an appointment. It will help you keep feeling good, and at your healthiest.