

BETter Living ...

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Keys to Embracing Aging – Know Your Health Numbers

There are many numbers that we have to remember for different accounts, passwords, addresses and much more. One set of numbers that can help save and extend our life are health numbers. These include: Cholesterol, Fasting Triglyceride, Blood Pressure, Fasting Blood Sugar, Body Mass Index, and Waist Circumference.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance found in the lipids in your blood. The recommended target cholesterol level for men and women is <200 mg/dl. Cholesterol is essential for the body to build and maintain healthy cells and essential hormones. There are two forms of cholesterol: low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL), also known as the “bad” cholesterol and high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL), also known as the “good” cholesterol. Too much LDL cholesterol creates a plaque that can accumulate and clog the arteries, causing heart disease and stroke. HDL cholesterol is good because it helps clean the artery walls and carry away the excess bad cholesterol.

Try some of the following to increase HDL cholesterol:

- Increase unsaturated fats in the diet, including omega-3 fatty acids, such as: sesame, flax, pumpkin seeds or pumpkin seed oil, avocado oil, olive oil, fat in peanut butter, and fish.
- Add soluble fiber to your diet such as: oats, fruits, vegetables, and legumes.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Regularly exercise.
- Avoid smoking and secondhand smoke.
- Talk to a medical provider about medication and other treatment option.

Fasting Triglyceride

Fasting Triglyceride is a form of fat that circulates in the blood stream. The healthy level is less than 150 mg/dl. Triglycerides are responsible for the energy tissues need to function. Triglycerides are often measured with cholesterol and should be tested every five years beginning at age 20 or more often depending on risk factors.

Dietary and lifestyle changes help lower triglyceride levels:

- Maintain a healthy body weight.
- Avoid fatty foods and foods high in cholesterol such as processed meat, fried food, and whole-fat dairy products.
- Eat fruits, vegetables, and nonfat or low-fat dairy products most often.
- Eat foods high in good, unsaturated fats.
- Do not drink alcohol in excess.
- Exercise moderately for at least 150 minutes per week.

Blood Pressure

Blood Pressure is recorded as two numbers, and written as a ratio. The top number, referred to as the systolic blood pressure, measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats. The diastolic,

or bottom number, refers to the amount of pressure in the arteries when the heart is resting and refilling with blood between heartbeats. A healthy blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg.

Maintaining a healthy blood pressure can be simple and easy:

- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or nonfat dairy products.
- Avoid excess salt.
- Engage in regular physical activity.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Manage stress.
- Avoid tobacco.
- Limit alcohol.

Fasting Blood Sugar

Blood sugar, or glucose, is a type of sugar that travels through the blood stream. It comes from carbohydrate foods and acts as a basic fuel for the body. The three main types of carbohydrates in food include: sugars, starches, and fiber. The Mayo Clinic emphasizes the importance of a balanced diet with healthy carbohydrates. A healthy fasting blood sugar level is <100 mg/dl.

Healthy carbohydrates include:

- Fiber-rich fruits and vegetables without added sugar
- Whole grains
- Low-fat dairy
- Beans and legumes
- Limited sugar

Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI is a ratio between height and weight used as a tool to help judge body fat and weight. BMI calculations group weight into five categories: underweight, normal, overweight, obese, and extremely obese. The normal BMI range for adults is 18.5 to 24.5.

To take control of your BMI:

- Burn more calories than you consume by exercising and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Exercise a minimum of 150 minutes a week for adults.
- Lose or gain weight in a healthy manner.
- Consult with a medical provider.

Waist Circumference

The American Heart Association recommends a waist circumference of 40 inches or less for men and 35 inches or less for women. Fat distribution is now just as important as total body weight when it comes to weight-related health problems. This is because body fat that accumulates around the waist and stomach area poses a greater risk than fat stored in the lower half of the body.

Keeping up with your numbers can help you reduce negative health effects such as obesity, diseases of the heart, hypertension, diabetes, and cancers.

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