

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Waist Circumference: Men should have a waist circumference of less than 40 inches. The figure for women is less than 35 inches.

Body Mass Index: People with BMIs less than 18.5 are underweight. Target BMI range is between 18.5 and 24.9. Overweight is considered between 25 and 30, and a BMI above 30 puts you in the obese category.

Blood Pressure: The only number that really matters is 120 over 80, which is the cutoff for a normal blood pressure reading. The more one's blood pressure surpasses that level, the more damage to the vascular system, heart, and kidneys. The top number is called systolic blood pressure and is the measure of pressure while the heart beats. The bottom number is called diastolic and is the measure of pressure between heart beats.

Cholesterol and Triglycerides: HDL (good cholesterol) should be above 40 mg/DL for men and above 50 mg/DL for women (women tend to have higher HDL before menopause); above 60 mg/DL is categorized as protective to your heart. LDL ideally should be below 100 mg/DL, though up to 129 mg/DL is near optimal. High LDL is considered 160 mg/DL or above. Triglycerides should be below 150 mg/DL.

Resting Heart Rate: A normal resting heart rate is between 60 and 100 beats per minute. Check yours by finding your wrist's pulse, counting the beats in a 15-second period, and then multiplying by four.

Blood sugar: The normal range for a fasting blood glucose test is typically less than 100 milligrams per deciliter; pre-diabetes is indicated by a level between 100 and 125 mg/dL and diabetes by a reading of 126 mg/dL or above. A normal hemoglobin A1C level is below 6 percent. To be on the safe side, also request that your fasting insulin be checked. The optimal range for fasting insulin is < 3.

C-Reactive Protein: Inflammation is a process our body uses to fight off an assault, like a cold or injury, in order to heal. But over the long term, chronic inflammation plays a detrimental role to health because byproducts—inflammatory molecules like cytokines—are believed to be part of several disease processes, including atherosclerosis, obesity, and Alzheimer's disease. In the realm of heart disease, much ado has been made of C - reactive protein, a marker for one's level of inflammation that can be picked up through a blood test called hs-CRP, for high-sensitivity C - reactive protein. A hs-CRP measure of 1 mg/L means you are at low risk of developing cardiovascular disease, a measure between 1 and 3 mg/L means you are at average risk, and levels above 3 mg/L means your risk is high.

Hours of Sleep per Night: Get eight hours of sleep per night. Making it happen isn't easy, but do it anyway.

Exercise: A minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week—say, brisk walking that boosts your heart rate. This translates into 30 minutes of exercise on five days of the week. Twice-weekly strength training of eight to 10 exercises, up to 12 reps each, is also on their to-do list. And activities that stretch the muscles and connective tissue every day!

Cigarettes: To protect against heart disease (not to mention cancer, stroke, and reproductive problems), the goal is to smoke exactly zero cigarettes.

Alcohol Intake: Otherwise healthy individuals who drink should do so in moderation. That is defined as one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. And be careful with the pour: The AHA defines a drink as one 12-ounce beer, a 4 ounce glass of wine, 1.5 ounce of 80-proof spirits, or 1 ounce of 100-proof spirits.

Salt Intake: We should limit salt intake to 1.5 grams daily. Be wary: Sodium creeps in via unexpected sources, and it's not so much the salt shaker on our table that's to blame. Research suggests we get as much as 80 percent of our daily salt intake from processed foods.

Processed Sweeteners: Women should get no more than 100 calories per day of processed sweeteners and men should stop at 150 calories per day.