

Hearty numbers

Four heart-health numbers to know

With February being American Heart Month, it's the perfect time to focus on your heart and evaluate your risk for heart disease. So, how do you know if you are at risk? Measuring four main areas of your health will help you answer that question.

Your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and body mass index all contribute to your overall heart health. Here are some details and numbers you should target for a healthy heart:

- **Blood pressure.** Your blood pressure measures the force of the blood flowing through your blood vessels and if consistently too high, it's considered hypertension. There are two important numbers to keep in mind when you have your blood pressure taken: the top number referred to as systolic pressure (the pressure your blood exerts against your artery walls) and the bottom number known as diastolic pressure (the pressure exerting against your artery walls while the heart is resting.)
Target numbers: 120 (systolic)/80 (diastolic).
- **Cholesterol.** This is the waxy substance needed to build cells. Cholesterol can become a problem for people when there's too much, causing it to build up in your arteries. Your total cholesterol is made up of HDL, usually referred to as "good" cholesterol and "bad" cholesterol, LDL.
Target numbers: Total cholesterol of less than 200 mg/dL, HDL cholesterol of 40 mg/dL or higher, and a LDL of less than 100 mg/dL
- **Blood sugar.** Much of the food we eat turns into glucose, also known as blood sugar. This glucose is used for energy, but can lead to heart, kidney, eye and nerve damage when there is too much in your blood. It can also lead to diabetes. The two types of sugar found in the American diet, natural sugar and added sugar, can be included in your diet, but you should limit them.
Target numbers: Fasting blood sugar – 100 mg/dL or below
- **Body mass index.** Calculated using both your height and weight, your body mass index (BMI) is a fairly easy way to figure out your weight "category", like underweight, normal weight, overweight, and obese.
Target numbers: Healthy weight – less than 25 BMI

The best way to get a pulse on your overall health is to schedule an annual preventive exam with your personal or family doctor. Wellmark members can find doctors and facilities in their network by logging in to Wellmark.com and using the myWellmark Care Finder. If your numbers aren't where you want them to be, your doctor can help you make a plan to bring those numbers closer to target.