

Prevention Newsletter



...for the health and well-being of you and your family.

Heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, diabetes and many other chronic conditions are able to be prevented by simply being familiar with your body. You can do this by visiting your doctor annually, as well as getting cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure levels tested regularly. Don't suffer needlessly with a preventable condition! Learn about what actions you can take to ensure you live a healthy life.

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Know Your Numbers!

Knowing your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and body mass index (BMI) are vital in determining whether you are at risk for developing major illnesses such as heart disease or diabetes. If you know your numbers are out of the healthy range, you can take measures to get yourself back into good health.

Total Cholesterol = 200 or Less

There are two kinds of cholesterol: LDL (“bad”) and HDL (“good”). Your HDL level should be above 60 and your LDL should be below 130. Start having your cholesterol checked every five years beginning at age 20; if you have an elevated level at any point, you will want to get it checked more often. Children over age 2 should be checked regularly if there is a family history of heart disease or high cholesterol earlier than age 55.

Blood Pressure = 120 over 80

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a condition in which resting blood pressure is consistently measured at 140 over 90 or greater. The higher number – *systolic pressure* – indicates when the heart beats, and the lower number – *diastolic pressure* – is when the heart is at rest. There are no symptoms of high blood pressure; it is often called the silent killer for this very reason. If left untreated, high blood pressure can cause heart failure, aneurysms, kidney failure, and/or stroke. Get your blood pressure checked at least once every year.

*Knowing
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Blood Sugar = 80 to 120

Glucose is sugar that is stored in the blood as your main source of energy. If your glucose levels are too high (hyperglycemia) or too low (hypoglycemia), you can develop diabetes. Symptoms of diabetes include frequent urination, extreme hunger and thirst, unusual weight loss, increased fatigue, and blurry vision. If left untreated, diabetes can lead to heart disease, blindness, kidney disease and/or even amputation of the arms or legs. Get your blood sugar tested every 3 years, unless you have pre-diabetes, in which case you should get it checked every year.

Body Mass Index (BMI) = Less than 25

To calculate your BMI, use the calculator at www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi.

BMI is regarded as the most useful tool to determine and classify obesity. It measures body fat according to height and weight and correlates with a person's risk of disease and death. A BMI of over 25 indicates that you are overweight; if it is over 30, you are classified as obese. If you have a BMI of 18.5 or below you are considered underweight, which is just as big of a health problem. Underweight people are at a higher risk for osteoporosis, fertility problems and overall illness due to a weakened immune system. It may be a shock to you to learn what category you fall into, but knowledge is the first step in taking good care of yourself.

Tips for Getting – and Staying – Healthy

Not pleased with your numbers? Here's how to ease into a healthier lifestyle:

- Quit smoking!
- Be realistic about your goals – if you try to reduce calories, fats and sugar while increasing exercise all at the same time, you may be setting yourself up for failure. Set smaller goals and add new ones as you are successful.
- Read the labels on the products you buy. You may be surprised to discover that frozen dinner is not as heart-healthy as it claims to be.
- Choose low sodium alternatives of foods such as soup, nuts and crackers.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Use unsaturated vegetable oils, and opt for “baked” or “steamed” versions of your favorite foods instead of fried.
- Fiber is your friend! High-fiber foods help you feel fuller for longer periods of time. Try whole grain cereals, legumes, fruits and vegetables.
- Only drink alcohol in moderation, or abstain completely.
- Prepare meals and snacks at home. You will eat healthier and save money too!
- Physical activity is a must. You should aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity at a minimum of 5 days a week. This doesn't just have to be at the gym; consider more creative options, such as taking the dog for a walk, doing some gardening, shoveling some snow, or going dancing with friends!