



Numbers To Know[®]

Understanding your blood pressure,
cholesterol and BMI

aetna[®]

[aetnamedicare.com](https://www.aetnamedicare.com)



Let's talk about blood pressure

Together, we can learn the basics. Blood pressure is written as two numbers, one over the other. The top number is the pressure while the heart is beating. We call this number your systolic pressure. The bottom number is the pressure when the heart is resting. This number is your diastolic pressure.



130

**Systolic
pressure**

80

**Diastolic
pressure**

If your blood pressure is 130/80, we say it's "130 over 80."

Know your blood pressure goals

It's important to keep your blood pressure within normal range in order to keep your blood vessels and heart healthy. The goal for adults with hypertension — high blood pressure — is less than 130/80.¹

For adults with hypertension who are over age 65, the systolic blood pressure goal is less than 130. Doctors may recommend a different blood pressure goal for older adults with more health problems.

Systolic pressure
less than

130

Pregnant women, children and healthy adults may have different goals.

Always discuss your blood pressure goal with your doctor.

What happens to people with high blood pressure?

High blood pressure makes the heart work harder. It can cause a heart attack, stroke and kidney problems.

How can you improve your blood pressure?

The good news is that you can take steps to lower your blood pressure. Your health is unique to you. **That's why we recommend that you talk to your doctor about how you can lower your blood pressure.**

You can also read our healthy lifestyle tips on page 5.

¹Whelton PK, Carey RM, Aronow WS, et al. 2017 ACC/AHA/AAPA/ABC/ACPM/AGS/APhA/ASH/ASPC/NMA/PCNA guideline for the prevention, detection, evaluation, and management of high blood pressure in adults: executive summary. Journal of the American College of Cardiology. 2017. doi: 10.1016/j.jacc.2017.11.005. Available at: onlinejacc.org/content/early/2017/11/04/jacc.2017.11.005. Accessed March 15, 2018.



Let's talk about cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found in the blood. It's a normal part of blood. But too much cholesterol can block the flow of blood to the heart or brain. With your doctor's help, you can lower your cholesterol and prevent a heart attack or stroke. The most common test to measure cholesterol is referred to as a basic or standard lipid panel.

HDL

"good"
cholesterol



LDL

"bad"
cholesterol



TRIGLYCERIDES

type of fat in
the blood



- HDL cholesterol is the "good" cholesterol. It helps keep the arteries from becoming blocked.
- LDL cholesterol is the "bad" cholesterol. Too much LDL cholesterol can block the arteries.
- Triglycerides are another kind of fat in the blood. They can also raise your risk for heart disease.

How can you improve your cholesterol?

The good news is that you can take steps to lower your cholesterol. **We recommend that you talk with your doctor about your risk factors for heart disease and stroke.**

You can also check out our healthy lifestyle tips on page 5.

Lowering your blood pressure and cholesterol

High blood pressure and high cholesterol are never “cured.” But you may lower your numbers by making lifestyle changes and taking medicine. Lowering your blood pressure and cholesterol may take time. Be patient and stay on your treatment plan.

Healthy lifestyle tips for you



Get at least 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week. You can do this 10 minutes at a time. Get your doctor’s OK first.



Lose some of those extra pounds — even 10 pounds can make a difference.



Eat foods that are low in salt and fat. That means fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products.



Don’t smoke. If you smoke, pick a quit date and ask your doctor for help.



Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.



Ask your family members for help. They’ll be happy you’re taking steps to live a longer and healthier life.



And, of course, keep taking your medicine as directed by your doctor.

Follow this checklist

There are usually no symptoms of high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

That's why it's important to:



Schedule regular visits with your doctor



Write down your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers



Have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked regularly



Stay on the treatment plan you and your doctor agreed upon



Let's talk about body mass index (BMI)

BMI is the measure of body fat based on height and weight. The higher your BMI, the higher your risk of obesity-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

Calculate your BMI

When you go for your annual physical, your doctor can determine your BMI. There are also many websites you can use to quickly calculate it.

What does your BMI number mean?

Your BMI rate can fall into one of four categories.

A BMI of:

- 18.4 or lower is considered underweight
- 18.5 – 24.9 is considered normal weight
- 25 – 29.9 is considered overweight
- 30 or higher is considered obese

How can you improve your BMI?

Lifestyle changes such as exercising and eating healthier can help improve your BMI. **It's important that you talk to your doctor first.** They know your health history and can make the best recommendation for you.

Putting it all together



It's important that you understand your blood pressure, cholesterol and BMI. Once you do, you can start making healthy lifestyle changes that can improve your numbers.



Taking your medicines

To get the most out of your medicines, you must take them exactly as the doctor ordered.

To stay on track, try to:

- Understand how much medicine you need and how often you should take it
- Know why and when you should take your medicines
- Order and pick up your refills before you run out
- Ask for a three-month supply if your pharmacy plan has this option. It could help you save money

Have trouble remembering to take your medicines?

- Take them at the same time each day as part of your daily routine.
- Set an alarm to remind you when to take them.
- Use pillboxes marked with the days of the week.



Get the most out of your doctor visits

We understand that doctor visits can be overwhelming. Here are some tips to help you be prepared. Before you go:

- Make a list of questions, symptoms and concerns
- Make a list of your medicines, including herbal supplements and vitamins, and any medicines you get from other doctors
- Ask a family member or friend to go with you — they can remind you of your questions and write down the answers

At the doctor's:

- Talk to your doctor about how you feel. Let them know if you're having health problems and what you're doing to improve your health.
- Ask to have your blood pressure taken again at the end of the visit, if it's above 130/80 when first taken. This could make a difference in your blood pressure reading.
- Be sure to let your doctor know if you think your medicine is causing a problem.
- Tell your doctor if cost is a concern. There may be another medicine that costs less and works the same.
- Discuss the benefits and risks of taking a low-dose aspirin.



What three questions should you ask?

Every time you talk with a doctor, nurse or pharmacist, use the Ask Me 3[®] questions below to better understand your health.* They are designed to help you talk with your health care provider.

You can ask:

- What is my main problem?
- What do I need to do?
- Why is it important for me to do this?

*Ask Me 3 is a registered trademark licensed to the National Patient Safety Foundation.

Helpful resources

There's a lot to learn when it comes to your blood pressure, cholesterol and BMI. We hope this guide helps you better understand your numbers and what you can do to improve them.

Here are some websites you can visit to learn more:

Heart health

Visit the American Heart Association at **mylifecheck.heart.org**.

Visit the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at **nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics**.

On the website, you can search for information about:

- Healthy recipes
- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol

Diabetes

Visit the American Diabetes Association website at **diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/**.

Patient safety

Want to compare hospitals?

Just go to **leapfroggroup.org**.

Looking for more information about managing your health?

Go to your secure member website. There, you can:

- Check your claims
- Find a doctor, pharmacy or facility
- Get discounts on gym memberships, weight loss programs, books and a variety of other products

Aetna Medicare is a PDP, HMO, PPO plan with a Medicare contract. Our SNPs also have contracts with State Medicaid programs. Enrollment in our plans depends on contract renewal. See Evidence of Coverage for a complete description of plan benefits, exclusions, limitations and conditions of coverage. Plan features and availability may vary by service area. Discount offers are rate-access offers and may be in addition to any plan benefits. Check any insurance benefits you have before using these discount offers, as those benefits may result in lower costs to you than using these discounts. Aetna makes no payment to the discount vendor. The member is responsible for the full cost of discounted services. Aetna may receive a percentage of the fee paid to a discount vendor. Not all health services are covered.