



FAMILY CAREGIVER

HEALTH BULLETIN



MARCH 2017

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

KNOW YOUR HEALTH NUMBERS



Our daily lives are flooded with numbers. PIN numbers, phone numbers and various account numbers. But there are also certain health numbers that can save and extend your life. These numbers are associated with cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, blood sugar, body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference. As a caregiver, it is important to make regular trips to the doctor to be sure that you are on top of your health numbers. This will make you a better, stronger and healthier caregiver, and will also contribute to your own overall well-being.

Cholesterol

There are two forms of cholesterol: low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL), also known as the “bad” cholesterol, and high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL), 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.

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To increase HDL (good) cholesterol:

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

Triglycerides

Triglycerides, like cholesterol, are a form of fat that circulate in the bloodstream. The body uses triglycerides for energy in between meals but if levels are too high, they can increase the risk of heart disease.

Dietary and lifestyle changes that help lower triglyceride levels:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Eat fruits, vegetables, and nonfat or low-fat dairy
- Eat foods high in good unsaturated fats
- Do not drink alcohol in excess
- Exercise regularly

Blood sugar

Blood sugar or glucose is found in the blood and supplies energy to the body's cells. It comes from the food you eat. Blood sugar levels that are too high or low can cause health concerns. Diabetes, a disease in which blood sugar levels are too high, is the most common disease related to blood sugar.

To maintain healthy blood sugar levels:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat breakfast
- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, fiber and whole grains
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Skip fad diets and make healthy choices

A quick guide to keeping up with your numbers

- Cholesterol: less than 200
- Triglycerides: less than 150
- Blood Pressure: less than 120/80
- Blood Sugar: less than 100
- BMI: 18 to 25
- Waist Circumference: less than 40 (men) and less than 35 (women)

BMI

BMI stands for Body Mass Index. It is a ratio between height and weight and is used as a tool to help judge body fat and weight and predict future health problems, including Type 2 Diabetes, dyslipidemia, hypertension and heart disease. According to BMI calculations, there are five weight categories: underweight, normal, overweight, obese and extremely obese. There are many BMI charts that can be found online or at your doctor's office.

Waist circumference

Body fat that accumulates around the waist and stomach area poses a greater risk than fat stored in the lower half of the body. Therefore, the measurement of your waist size (circumference), like BMI, can predict future health problems, especially when BMI is high.

A lifestyle that includes regular yearly visits to a healthcare provider, proper nutrition and physical activity promotes your health numbers and contributes to overall healthy aging, life quality and well-being throughout the lifespan.

SOURCES:

- Reference: Keys to Embracing Aging: Know Your Health Numbers. Retrieved December 12, 2016 from ftp://ftp.uaex.edu/Keys_To_Aging/Handouts/08%20Know%20Your%20Numbes.pdf

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