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to Lower
Cholesterol

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Seniors



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703-999-3006

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Four Health Numbers You Should Know

Learn the four basic numbers you should know to assess your health.

You can rattle off your cell phone and Social Security numbers without a second thought. But can you recite the numbers that add up to good health: Your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood sugar level and body mass index?

These four measurements are crucial indicators of your overall health, especially related to the risk for heart attack and stroke. Unlike your family history, ethnicity and gender – which cannot be changed – these factors can be altered by the choices you make every day.

“Disease prevention is a numbers game that you can often control,” says Joline Heo, M.D., an internal medicine physician with Sutter East Bay Medical Foundation. “If your blood pressure, cholesterol, weight and other numbers are higher than normal, you can take steps to lower them — before your health becomes compromised.”

On the flip side, if your numbers are within a healthy range, you know you’re



on track with your current healthy lifestyle habits.

Silent Symptoms

Having high blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar often causes few, if any, symptoms at first. The only way to know your levels is to measure them.

Talk with your doctor about health screenings you may need, especially if

you have a family history of heart disease, stroke or diabetes. The American Heart Association recommends that you begin heart health screenings at age 20 and repeat them every 4-6 years. If you have a family history of heart disease or other specific risk factors, your doctor may recommend more frequent screening.

Here are the four types of numbers everyone should know—and why.

Blood Pressure

- Your healthy target: 120/80 mm Hg or less

Why it matters: Your blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. If it's too high, your heart has to work harder. Over time, high blood pressure can cause your heart to enlarge or weaken. This can lead to heart failure. High blood pressure can also narrow your arteries, which disrupts proper blood flow to your heart or brain and can trigger a heart attack or stroke.

Blood Cholesterol

Your healthy target:

- Total blood cholesterol lower than 200 mg/dL
- LDL cholesterol less than 100 mg/dL
- HDL cholesterol greater than 60 mg/dL
- Triglycerides – should be under 150 mg/dL

Why it matters: Cholesterol is a fatty substance found in your body's cells. It helps your body make important vitamins and hormones. But too much cholesterol can lead to plaque buildup inside your blood vessels. This sticky substance causes your arteries to harden and narrow, which limits blood flow. These blockages can create a heart attack or, if they're located in the brain, a stroke.

Fasting Blood Glucose

Your healthy target:

- Up to 100 mg/dL
- Levels of 100 to 125 mg/DL point to prediabetes
- Anything above 125 mg/DL falls into the diabetic range

Why it matters: Your body breaks

down food into glucose, which cells absorb for energy. When this process goes awry, glucose builds up in the blood. Extra sugar in your bloodstream is a sign of diabetes, a disease that can harm every organ in your body, while also damaging nerves and blood vessels.

Body Mass Index

- Your healthy target: 5 to 24.9

Why it matters: Your BMI is a weight-height calculation that can help determine if you're overweight or obese. "Excess body fat increases your risk for a wide range of health problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and sleep apnea," Dr. Heo says. A BMI over 30 is especially dangerous to your overall health.

Numbers Too High? Here are 5 Ways to Lower Them

Your doctor says one or more of your vital health numbers is too high. Now what?

Whether you need to lower your blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose or BMI, these five steps can help you get back on track.

1. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity — such as walking, jogging, swimming, biking or dancing — five days per week.
2. Eat a heart-healthy diet. Fill your plate with plenty of fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains and low-fat dairy products.
3. Quit smoking.
4. Limit alcohol. If you drink alcohol, do so moderately. That means no more than one drink daily for women and no more than two drinks daily for men.
5. Ask about medications. "In addition to making lifestyle changes, taking certain medications can provide an extra boost to bring your numbers within the healthy range," Dr. Heo says. Talk with your doctor to learn if your situation warrants medications to bring your numbers into balance.

Joline Heo, M.D., FACP

Sutter East Bay Medical Foundation



Cholesterol: Top Foods to Improve Your Numbers

Diet can play an important role in lowering your cholesterol. Here are some foods to improve your cholesterol and protect your heart.

Can a bowl of oatmeal help lower your cholesterol? How about a handful of almonds? A few simple tweaks to your diet — along with exercise and other heart-healthy habits — might help you lower your cholesterol.

Oatmeal, oat bran and high-fiber foods

Oatmeal has soluble fiber, which reduces your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, the “bad” cholesterol. Soluble fiber is also found in such foods as kidney beans, Brussels sprouts, apples and pears.

Soluble fiber can reduce the absorption of cholesterol into your bloodstream. Five to 10 grams or more of soluble fiber a day decreases your LDL cholesterol.

One serving of a breakfast cereal with oatmeal or oat bran provides 3 to 4 grams of fiber. If you add fruit, such as a banana or berries, you’ll get even more fiber.

Fish and omega-3 fatty acids

Fatty fish has high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which can reduce your triglycerides — a type of fat found in blood. These acids also may help lower your blood pressure and risk of developing blood clots. In people who have already had heart attacks, omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of sudden death.

Omega-3 fatty acids don’t affect LDL cholesterol levels but may help lower triglycerides and increase HDL, the good cholesterol. But because of those acids’ other heart benefits, the American Heart Association recommends eating at least two servings of fish a week. Baking or grilling the fish avoids adding unhealthy fats.

The highest levels of omega-3 fatty acids are in:

- Mackerel.
- Herring.
- Tuna.
- Salmon.
- Trout.

Foods such as walnuts, flaxseed and canola oil also have small amounts of omega-3 fatty acids.

Omega-3 and fish oil supplements are available. Talk to your doctor before taking any supplements.

Almonds and other nuts

Almonds and other tree nuts can improve blood cholesterol. Studies have shown that walnuts, which have omega-3 fats, may help protect the heart and lower the risk of heart attack for people who already have heart disease. All nuts are high in calories, so a handful added to a salad or eaten as a snack will do.

Avocados

Avocados are a good source of nutrients as well as monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs). Research suggests that the fiber from avocados can improve HDL cholesterol levels and the quality of LDL cholesterol. Adding two servings of avocado per week to a heart-healthy diet can lower your risk of heart disease.

People tend to think of avocados in guacamole, which often is eaten with high-fat corn chips. Try adding avocado slices to salads and sandwiches or eating them as a side dish. Also try guacamole with raw cut vegetables, such as cucumber slices.

Replacing saturated fats, such as those found in meats, with MUFAs are part of what makes the Mediterranean diet heart healthy.

Olive oil

Try using olive oil in place of other fats in your diet. You can saute vegetables in olive oil, add it to a marinade or mix it with vinegar as a salad dressing. You can also use olive oil as a substitute for butter when basting meat or as a dip for bread. Extra virgin olive oil also reduces the risk of heart attacks.

Foods with added plant sterols or stanols

Sterols and stanols are substances found in plants that help block the absorption of cholesterol. Foods that have been fortified with sterols or stanols are

available.

Margarines and orange juice with added plant sterols can help lower LDL cholesterol. Adding 2 grams of sterol to your diet every day can lower your LDL cholesterol by 5% to 15%.

It's not clear whether food with plant sterols or stanols lowers your risk of heart attack or stroke — although experts assume that foods that lower cholesterol do cut the risk. Plant sterols or stanols don't appear to affect levels of triglycerides or of high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, the “good” cholesterol.

Whey protein

Whey protein, which is found in dairy products, may account for many of the health benefits attributed to dairy. Studies have shown that whey protein given as a supplement lowers both LDL and total cholesterol as well as blood pressure. You can find whey protein powders in health food stores and some grocery stores.

Other changes to your diet

Getting the full benefit of these foods requires other changes to your diet and lifestyle. One of the most helpful changes is limiting the saturated and trans fats you eat.

Saturated fats — such as those in meat, butter, cheese and other full-fat dairy products — raise your total cholesterol. Decreasing your consumption of saturated fats to less than 7% of your total daily calorie intake can reduce your LDL cholesterol by 8% to 10%.

Trans fats, sometimes listed on food labels as “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil,” are often used in margarines and store-bought cookies, crackers and cakes. Trans fats raise overall cholesterol levels. The Food and Drug Administration banned the use of partially hydrogenated vegetable oils in processed foods sold after January 1, 2020.

By Mayo Clinic Staff



5 Stretching Exercises for Seniors

Aging may affect a person's mobility. Motions such as getting out of a chair or walking around the house may take longer and cause more discomfort and stiffness. Stretching can play an important role in healthy aging and quality of life.

Research from 2022 concluded that adults over 55 years find that they can move the joints in their arms and legs roughly 6 degrees less than before and that people have less flexibility with every passing decade.

Stretching may help older adults improve their mobility as they age. This is because it increases muscle flexibility and improves the ranges of motion.

This article details five stretches seniors can practice and discusses the benefits of stretching and how to do them safely.

The benefits of stretching for seniors

For older adults, stretching can help smooth out important daily motions such as rotating the neck to check for traffic while reversing in a car or reaching down to tie shoelaces.

According to an older 2012 paper, different stretches involving static stretching can help seniors improve spinal mobility and gait. This type of stretching involves a person extending a muscle as far as they

can and holding that final position for around 15–30 seconds.

Stretching should form one part of an approach to physical exercise in later life, along with:

- endurance exercises such as jogging, brisk walking, or dancing
- resistance training, such as lightweight lifting
- balance exercises such as tai chi

1. Back stretch

An older 2011 study found that stretching out the back can help older adults reduce back pain and improve movement in the back. The risk of back pain increases with age, affecting around 45.6% of people over 65 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Back stretches can help make motions such as bending down to pick up an object easier — anything that puts pressure on the back.

The following is a gentle, seated back stretch that can account for reduced balance and stability while improving flexibility in the spine.

This exercise requires a chair with arms.

Sit in a chair with both feet flat on the floor.

Place the left hand toward the back of

the left arm of the chair, with the elbow pointing upward at a comfortable right angle.

Put the right hand on the left knee.

Gently twist to the left, stopping at the furthest point of the most.

Hold the stretch for 10–30 seconds, breathing deeply and relaxing into the stretch.

Repeat this 3–5 times.

Switch to the other side.

2. Inner thigh stretch

The following inner thigh stretch may help loosen up the muscles that support getting up from the floor.

Start in a lying down position on your back.

Have the knees in a relaxed bent position, pointing upward with both feet flat on the floor. Both arms should be straight by your side, palms facing down.

Slowly move the right knee to the floor, keeping the knee bent. Hold the stretch for 10–30 seconds.

Repeat the same leg movement on the other side.

Repeat this 3–5 times for each leg.

3. Single-leg ankle stretch

Falls become more likely for older adults. An older 2013 review found that foot and ankle exercise can help older adults reduce their risk of falling. Ankle stretches may also help the ankles feel less stiff on getting out of bed in the morning.

This exercise needs a robust chair with no arms.

Sit toward the front of the chair.

Have the legs out straight in front and the heels on the floor. The toes should start pointing upward in a natural, relaxed position.

Gently move the left ankle toward the floor as far as feels comfortable, pointing the toes.

Hold for 10–30 seconds, then return the foot to the starting position.

Repeat the motion with the other foot.

Repeat this 3–5 times on each side or foot.

A person can also do this move with

both feet at the same time for a double-leg ankle stretch.

4. Hamstring stretch

This stretch can help loosen up the hamstrings. A chair may be helpful for getting to the floor.

Safely and slowly get to the floor to lie down, using a chair if it helps. Take it one knee at a time. The starting position involves laying on your back with both legs and arms flat on the floor.

Bring the right leg into a bent knee position, placing the foot flat on the floor.

Slowly bring the left leg upward, keeping it as straight as possible.

The leg will naturally bend slightly as it raises. Grab the leg behind the calf muscle, gently pulling until you can feel a slight tension.

Hold the stretch for 10–30 seconds, breathing deeply to relax.

Slowly bring the leg back down into a straight position.

Repeat 3–5 times before moving on to the other leg.

5. Neck stretch

The following exercise can help loosen the neck. This can take place in a seated or standing position.

Relax the shoulders. The “start” position is with the head upright.

During every step, breathe deeply and relax into it.

The first movement is to slowly drop the head forward until you feel a slight tension in the back of the neck. Hold this for 15–30 seconds.

Bring the head back to the “start” position.

Repeat this, but slowly move the right ear to the right shoulder. Return to the “start” position.

Do the same for the left side.

Repeat the whole stretch 3–4 times.

It is important not to pull on the neck with the hands and only to move in the specified directions. Otherwise, this risks damage to the arteries in the back of the neck.

Those with arthritis should be careful about moving slowly, as rapid movements

may cause dizziness.

When to stretch

Older adults should try to have a dedicated stretching session 2–3 times every week.

Warming up the muscles before stretching can help older adults avoid injury. It is best to stretch after endurance or strength exercises.

However, those looking to stretch out tightness or aches outside of physical activity can do some light walking to prime the muscles before loosening up.

Learn more about daily stretching routines.

Summary

Stretching 2–3 times per week is an important part of maintaining flexibility and stability as an older adult. A range of stretches for the neck, back, arms, legs, and chest can help daily function, preserve independence, and reduce falls.

However, it is important to approach each stretch gently, breathe as usual, and do so after warming up the muscles with endurance or strength-building activities. Anyone who has had recent surgery or has health concerns should speak with a doctor before attempting certain stretches.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Independent You prides itself on having trained caregivers that are the best at what they do.

They are the cornerstone of our success as they treat our clients with compassion, empathy and respect. We truly value each of our caregivers.

At Independent You we are continually supporting our Team Members to live and work compassionately.

An example of a compassionate caregiver is **Avis W.** We would like to congratulate and recognize Avis as our August Caregiver of the Month. Avis has been with Independent You for nine years and has consistently shown herself to be an asset to not only our company, but to her clients as well. Thank you, Avis, for all you do!

We would also like to recognize **Waidi O.** as our Caregiver of the Month for September. Waidi continues to provide outstanding care for his clients. He is known for his patience and compassion, and we are fortunate enough to have such a great caregiver at Independent You. We appreciate you, Waidi!





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9489 A silver king court
fairfax, va. 22031