

February 2026 Issue

## Decode Your Health: What Your Numbers are Telling You



If you have ever met with a healthcare provider for a health check, you may already be familiar with your numbers.

The numbers linked to blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose play a key role in detecting risks for heart conditions and diabetes. Knowing your numbers can help you manage and prevent negative health outcomes.

Reviewing your numbers without context can be puzzling. Here is an overview of what these numbers mean. If you have questions or concerns regarding your numbers, be sure to contact your healthcare provider.

### Blood pressure

Blood pressure measures the force of blood against the walls of an artery as the heart pumps blood throughout the body. When blood pressure is consistently high, the risk of cardiovascular disease increases. Healthy lifestyle behaviors like exercising, managing stress, and sleeping well can help reduce blood pressure.

### Blood Pressure Categories

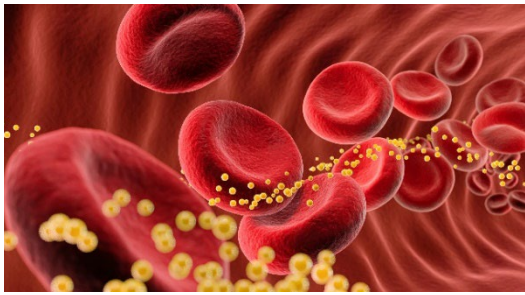


| BLOOD PRESSURE CATEGORY  | SYSTOLIC mm Hg<br>(top/upper number) |        | DIASTOLIC mm Hg<br>(bottom/lower number) |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------|--|
| NORMAL   | LESS THAN 120                        | and    | LESS THAN 80                             |
| ELEVATED   | 120–129                              | and    | LESS THAN 80                             |
| STAGE 1 HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)   | 130–139                              | or     | 80–89                                    |
| STAGE 2 HYPERTENSION (High Blood Pressure)   | 140 OR HIGHER                        | or     | 90 OR HIGHER                             |
| SEVERE HYPERTENSION (If you don't have symptoms*, call your health care professional.) | HIGHER THAN 180                      | and/or | HIGHER THAN 120                          |
| HYPERTENSIVE EMERGENCY (If you have any of these symptoms*, call 911.)                 | HIGHER THAN 180                      | and/or | HIGHER THAN 120                          |

\*symptoms: chest pain, shortness of breath, back pain, numbness, weakness, change in vision or difficulty speaking

[heart.org/bplevels](https://heart.org/bplevels)

© Copyright 2025 American Heart Association, Inc., a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit. All rights reserved. Unauthorized use prohibited. WF-950650 9/25



## Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a wax-like substance found in the body. Total cholesterol is made up of good and bad cholesterol, along with fats found in our blood.

High-density lipids (good cholesterol) prevent clogged arteries by clearing out the bad cholesterol. Regular exercise can improve HDL numbers.

Low Density Lipids (bad cholesterol) can lead to buildup in the arteries. Cooking with olive oil or avocado oil and eating fruits, vegetables, and foods high in fiber can help lower LDLs.

Triglycerides are a type of fat, found in the bloodstream, that our bodies use for energy. High triglyceride levels can indicate health risks. Avoid excess alcohol, foods that are high in saturated fat, and sugar to decrease the risk of high triglycerides

## Glucose

Glucose is the primary sugar found in your blood, regulated by a hormone called insulin. Increased glucose can indicate diabetes. Regular exercise and consistent healthy eating can help improve blood glucose numbers.

## General guidelines

- Total Cholesterol: Less than 200 mg/dL
- HDL Cholesterol: Greater than or equal to 40 mg/dL for men; greater than or equal to 50 mg/dL for women
- LDL Cholesterol: Less than 100 mg/dL
- Fasting Glucose: Less than 100 mg/dL

## How to improve your numbers

- **Eat a Healthy Diet:** Focus on fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, healthy fats, and whole grains to fuel your body and support long-term wellbeing.
- **Exercise Regularly:** Schedule time this week to move more, take a walk, try a new workout, or join the **Healthy Habits Challenge**.
- **Manage and Reduce Stress:** Practice deep breathing, express gratitude, spend time in nature, and prioritize healthy sleep habits to help your body and mind recharge.



## A February Focus on Prevention, Awareness, and Self-Care

Knowing your numbers empowers you to make lifestyle choices that support your health and align with your personal goals.

February shines a light on **heart health**, **Black history**, and **cancer prevention**. Show yourself some love by scheduling recommended preventive screenings and learning more about your heart health.

---

## Resources

[HDL \(Good\), LDL \(Bad\) Cholesterol and Triglycerides | American Heart Association](#)

[Heart-Healthy Living - What Is Heart-Healthy Living? | NHLBI, NIH](#)

[Blood Pressure Categories](#)