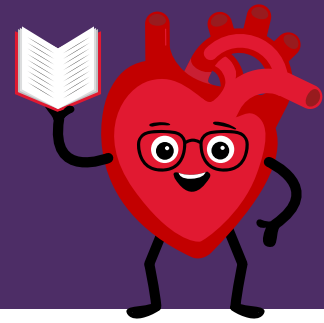# Heart Smart Basics
What to Know to Keep Yours Healthy

Being smart about your heart means knowing what causes heart disease and what your individual risk factors are. This fact sheet defines common heart-related terms you should know and sample questions to ask your healthcare provider to help keep your heart healthy.

General Heart Terms

- Heart
- Heart rate
- Heart health
- Heart disease
- Cardiovascular disease
- Coronary heart disease

The **heart** is a strong, muscular organ that pumps blood throughout your body.

Heart rate, also referred to as your pulse, is the number of times your heart beats in one minute. Resting heart rates vary from person to person.

Heart health is the overall well-being of your heart. Heart-healthy living involves understanding your risk factors, making healthy choices, and taking steps to reduce your chances of getting heart disease.

Heart disease is a catchall phrase for a variety of conditions that affect the heart's structure and function.

Cardiovascular disease is the term for all types of diseases that affect the heart or blood vessels.

Often simply referred to as "heart disease," **coronary heart disease** is the most common form and occurs when plaque (a combination of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in the blood) builds up in your arteries. The plaque reduces the amount of oxygen-rich blood getting to your heart.

Plaque can also lead to blood clots, which block blood flow and are the most common cause of a heart attack.

Medical Emergencies

- Heart attack
- Cardiac arrest
- Stroke

Act fast. Call 9-1-1.

A **heart attack**, also known as a myocardial infarction, happens when the flow of blood that brings oxygen to a part of your heart muscle suddenly becomes blocked. Your heart can't get enough oxygen. If blood flow is not restored quickly, the heart muscle will begin to die.

Cardiac arrest occurs when the heart suddenly and unexpectedly stops pumping. If this happens, blood stops flowing to the brain and other vital organs.

A **stroke** happens when blood flow to the brain is blocked. This prevents the brain from getting oxygen and nutrients from blood. Without oxygen and nutrients, brain cells begin to die within minutes. A stroke is also called a transient ischemic attack or cerebrovascular accident.

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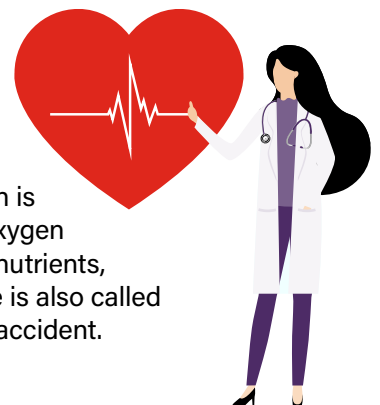
Blood Pressure Terms

- Blood pressure
- Hypertension
- Preeclampsia
- Blood pressure monitor
- Self-Monitored Blood Pressure (SMBP)

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as the heart pumps blood. Blood pressure is measured using two numbers – diastolic and systolic. Systolic is the first number and is the pressure when blood is pumped out of the heart. Diastolic is the second number and is the pressure between heartbeats when the heart is filling with blood.

Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, develops when blood flows through your arteries at higher than normal pressures.
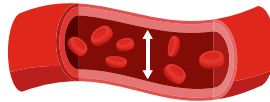
Healthy blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg. High blood pressure occurs when blood pressure is consistently 130/80 mm Hg or higher.

Preeclampsia is a type of high blood pressure that occurs only during pregnancy. It occurs after the 20th week of pregnancy.

A **blood pressure monitor** has an inflatable cuff that wraps around the arm. A healthcare provider will inflate the cuff, which gently tightens on your arm. The cuff has a gauge on it that will measure your blood pressure. The gauge uses a unit of measurement called millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) to measure the pressure in your blood vessels.

Self-Monitoring Blood Pressure (SMBP) involves a patient's regular use of personal blood pressure monitors to measure their blood pressure away from a doctor's office or hospital — usually at home. These blood pressure monitors are easy and safe to use.
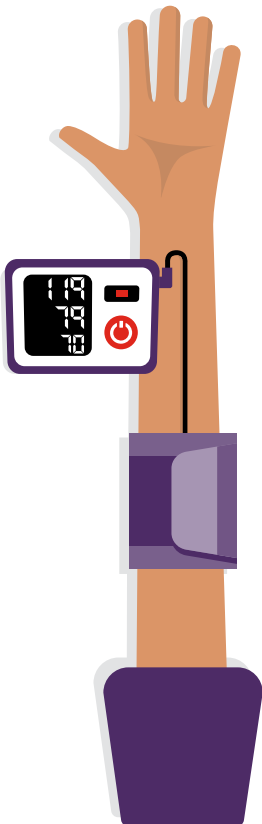
Blood Pressure Levels	
Classification	**Systolic and Diastolic Readings**
Normal	Systolic: less than 120 mm Hg Diastolic: less than 80 mm Hg
Elevated	Systolic: 120-129 mm Hg Diastolic: less than 80 mm Hg
High blood pressure	Systolic: 130 mm Hg or higher Diastolic: 80 mm Hg or higher

Cholesterol Terms

- Cholesterol
- High density lipoprotein (HDL)
- Low density lipoprotein (LDL)
- Triglycerides

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance in your cells. Our bodies generally make all the cholesterol needed for good health. Cholesterol helps make hormones, vitamin D, and substances to help you digest foods.

Small packages, called lipoproteins, carry cholesterol through your bloodstream. Two kinds of lipoproteins carry cholesterol:

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is the "good" cholesterol. HDL helps your body get rid of cholesterol so it doesn't clog your arteries.

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) is the "bad" cholesterol. LDL deposits cholesterol inside the blood vessels that carry blood to your heart and other parts of your body. Over time, this may cause your arteries to narrow or be blocked.

Triglycerides are a type of fat in your blood that your body uses for energy. A combination of high triglyceride and low HDL levels can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.

Normal artery   **Narrowed artery**

Desirable Cholesterol Numbers for Adults	
Triglycerides	Less than 150 mg/dL
Non-HDL cholesterol	Less than 130 mg/dL
HDL cholesterol	Above 40 mg/dL in men Above 50 mg/dL in women

* Lipid measurements in this table are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood.

** If your triglycerides and non-HDL are above these numbers or your HDL is below, you may want to discuss them with your healthcare provider.
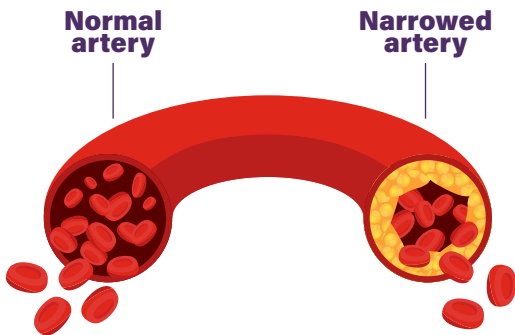
Diabetes Terms

- Diabetes
- Prediabetes

Diabetes is a disease that occurs when your blood glucose, also called blood sugar, is too high. Having too much glucose in your blood can cause health problems, such as heart disease.

Prediabetes is when your blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. Over time, a person with prediabetes can develop type 2 diabetes.

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Weight Control Terms

- Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Overweight
- Obesity
- BMI chart
- Waist size

Body Mass Index, or **BMI**, is one measurement used to show if your weight is in the healthy range for your height. BMI measures body fat based on height and weight. Your BMI will fall into one of the four categories — underweight, healthy weight, overweight, or obese.

Overweight and **obesity** means having excess body fat which can increase your LDL, the "bad" cholesterol, and lower HDL, the "good" cholesterol. Overweight and obesity can also increase triglycerides, a type of fat.

Weight Category	Body Mass Index
Underweight	Below 18.5
Healthy weight	18.5 to 24.9
Overweight	25 to 29.9
Obese	30 or above

The **BMI chart** is a table that will help you find your BMI number. Find your height in the left column. Move across the row to your weight. The number at the top of the column directly above your weight is your BMI number. There are also online calculators that will calculate your BMI.

Checking your **waist size** is another way to see if your weight increases your risk of health issues. If most of your fat is around your waist and you have a larger waist size you may be at a greater risk for, high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.
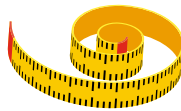
A healthy waist size is less than 35" for women who aren't pregnant and less than 40" for men.

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THE heart TRUTH

Be smart about your heart health and talk with your healthcare provider about yours at every visit.
Here are some questions you can use to guide the discussion:

Blood Pressure	Heart Disease Risk Factors	Staying Heart Healthy
• What was my blood pressure reading today and what do the numbers mean for me? • How often should I have my blood pressure checked? • What do my blood pressure numbers mean for me if I'm pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant? • Can any medicines that I take (prescribed or over-the counter) affect my blood pressure?	• What risk factors do I have for heart disease? Is there anything I can do to change these risks? • How can cholesterol affect my heart health? What are my cholesterol levels and are they in a healthy range? • What is my BMI and is there a goal I should be working towards? What is my healthy weight range? • If I smoke or drink, how does it affect my heart health?	• What do you recommend I do between now and my next visit that can lower my risk for heart disease? • How much physical activity do I need to keep my heart healthy? • What foods or diets that can help keep my heart healthy? • How can managing stress affect my heart health? • What tests should I get to get a better understanding of my heart health?

For more information to keep your heart healthy visit **hearttruth.gov**