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Get to Know Your Numbers

As part of your annual physical, your primary care physician might have gathered key numbers through testing that can be important indicators of your overall health. Regularly monitoring these numbers assists in identifying potential health risks and determining appropriate guidelines for managing them. Understanding and assessing what these measures mean can be the first step toward a healthier life. Read below for a general explanation of the more routine numbers likely to be measured at your physical or health screening:

Total Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a "wax-like" substance found in the body. Your body needs cholesterol to function, but levels too high can be harmful. Extra cholesterol can build up inside the walls of your blood vessels, and can reduce or even stop the blood flow that can cause a heart attack, stroke or other serious heart or blood vessel disease. To help prevent a high cholesterol level, focus on high fiber foods, whole grains, fruits and vegetables and food that is naturally low in fat. Try to limit saturated fat in your diet. Genetics/family history also play a role in your cholesterol levels.

- **Optimal**: Less than 200 mg/dL
- **Borderline High**: 200 – 239 mg/dL
- **High**: 240 mg/dL or higher

LDL Cholesterol

LDL Cholesterol is what is considered to be the "bad" cholesterol. It causes blockages in your arteries and can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke. Changes made to your diet to lower total cholesterol will also impact LDL levels. Your physician will determine the appropriate level for you based on other risks present for Cardiovascular Disease.

- **Optimal**: Less than 100 mg/dL
- **Near Optimal**: 100-129 mg/dL
- **Borderline High**: 130-159 mg/dl
- **High**: 160 mg/dL or higher

HDL Cholesterol

HDL Cholesterol often is referred to as the "good" cholesterol. It helps clear the LDL from the body, so the more you have of it, the better. You can improve HDL with regular physical activity. Smoking can have a negative impact on HDL levels.

- **Unhealthy Level for Men**: Less than 40 mg/dL
- **Unhealthy Level for Women**: Less than 50 mg/dL for An unhealthy level
- **Healthy Level for Men and Women**: 60 mg/dL or higher

Triglycerides

Triglycerides are the most common fat found in your blood. They are an important source of energy. High triglyceride levels may lead to heart disease, especially in people with low levels of "good" cholesterol and high levels of "bad" cholesterol, and in people with Type 2 diabetes. Avoiding alcohol and sweets will have a positive impact on your triglyceride level, although genetics also plays a role.

- **Very High Risk**: 500 mg/dL and above
- **High Risk**: 200-499 mg/dL
- **Borderline High Risk**: 150-199 mg/dL
- **Normal**: Less than 150 mg/dL

Glucose

Glucose is fuel for all the cells in your body when it's present at normal levels; however, it can behave like a slow-acting poison when it is constistently too high. High sugar levels slowly erode the ability of cells in your pancreas to make insulin. High levels of blood sugar can cause changes that lead to a hardening of the blood vessels, also known as atherosclerosis. Maintaining a healthy weight and participating in regular physical activity will decrease your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Fasting

- **Optimal**: 65-99 mg/dL
- **Pre-diabetes**: 100-125 mg/dL
- **Diabetes**: 126 mg/dL or higher

Blood Pressure

Blood Pressure is the force of blood against the walls of arteries. **Systolic pressure**, the top number, is the force of blood in the arteries as the heart beats. **Diastolic pressure**, the bottom number, is the force of blood in the arteries as the heart relaxes between beats. High blood pressure (hypertension) is dangerous because it increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. It places additional strain on blood vessels throughout your body and increases the workload on the heart. Eating a nutrionally spound diet, maintaining a healthy weight, participating in regular physical activity, not smoking and limiting alcohol use can decrease your risk of developing high blood pressure and help you manage it if you have it.

- **Optimal**: Less than 120/80 mmHg
- **Elevated**: 120/80 mmHg – 129/80 mmHg
- **Hypertension**: 130-139/80-89 mmHg or higher

Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI is a ratio between your height and your weight and does not take into consideration how much muscle mass and fat mass you have. To lower your BMI you will need to lose weight. Talk to your physician about what a healthy weight for you should be.

- **Low**: BMI less than 18.5
- **Desirable:** BMI of 18.5-24.9
- **High or Pre-Obese:** BMI of 25-29.9
- **Very High or Obese:** BMI of 30 or more

PLEASE NOTE: Your physician is the best person to determine what levels and measures are most healthy and attainable for your individual health needs.