

HEALTH CHECK THE NUMBERS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Think you're healthy? Knowing these key facts and figures about your health, and how to use them, can help keep you fit and well.

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WAIST

HEALTHY TARGET: As a general rule, a healthy waist measurement is a circumference below 94cm for Australian men and below 80cm for Australian women.

HOW TO MEASURE: Wrap a measuring tape around yourself, on or just above your belly button. Don't suck in your stomach!

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: Carrying excess weight around your middle or abdomen carries a higher risk of developing a chronic disease, such as obesity or heart disease, than when the weight is carried on the hips. This is because there is more fat sitting around your vital organs like your heart, liver and kidneys.

below 80cm = healthy waist measurement for women
below 94cm = healthy waist measurement for men

HEART RATE

HEALTHY TARGET: A normal adult resting heart rate is between 60–80 beats per minute (with an average of 72 beats/minute). Heart rate usually increases with age, and is generally lower in athletes and those who are physically fit.

HOW TO MEASURE: Turn one hand over, palm facing upwards. Press the fingers of the other hand on the side of the wrist until you

feel your pulse. Your heart rate is the number of beats felt in a minute (or the number of beats in 15 seconds multiplied by four).

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: A heart rate that is higher or lower than the average could indicate health problems, such as dehydration, hypothyroidism or diabetes. Your heart rate can also increase at times due to exercise, excessive caffeine intake, anxiety or even stress.

60–80 beats per minute = healthy heart rate

BLOOD CHOLESTEROL

HEALTHY TARGET: Healthy people with no family history of heart disease should have a total blood cholesterol level less than 5.5mmol/L and LDL cholesterol (or 'bad' cholesterol) level less than 3.5mmol/L.

For those with heart disease (or at a high risk), total cholesterol should be less than 4.0mmol/L and LDL cholesterol should be less than 2.0mmol/L. Everyone should have HDL ('good') cholesterol greater than 1mmol/L.

HOW TO MEASURE: Blood cholesterol levels are measured with a blood test, which is best done after fasting.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: Cholesterol is essential for processes such as producing hormones and forming and maintaining cell membranes. However, high levels of the wrong kinds of cholesterol in the blood can increase your risk of developing heart disease.

It is important to lower your LDL cholesterol, because it causes fatty deposits on the wall of blood vessels that may lead to narrowed or blocked arteries. HDL cholesterol is considered protective, as it carries cholesterol to the liver, where it is either used by or passed from the body.

Total cholesterol = less than 5.5mmol/L



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BLOOD GLUCOSE

HEALTHY TARGET: Your blood sugar, or blood glucose, level varies slightly throughout the day – between 4.0–8.0mmol/L – and the body has well-tuned mechanisms to keep it within this limited range.

HOW TO MEASURE: To test for pre-diabetes or diabetes, blood glucose levels can be measured by your GP at any time of day. However, the most

accurate measure is taken after an overnight fast. Increased thirst, a need to urinate often or excessive tiredness can indicate high blood glucose. Low blood glucose is easier to spot, as the symptoms are more immediate.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: Glucose fuels the brain, so when it falls, you can feel light-headed, irritable, tired, unable to concentrate and even faint.

High blood glucose is usually caused by pre-diabetes or diabetes and can have serious long-term effects, including damage to your eyes, kidneys, heart and feet.

4.0–6.0mmol/L = healthy fasting blood glucose level



SLEEP

HEALTHY TARGET: Whether you are an early bird or a night owl, most adults need seven to nine hours of sleep each day. Newborn babies need up to double this amount, while children need up to 10 hours a day as they head into their teens.

HOW TO MEASURE: Keep a record of the number of hours

you sleep each night (use the chart on p30). Less than seven hours a night can lead to sleep deprivation.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: A lack of sleep can result in reduced concentration, irritability and difficulty retaining information, but these side-effects can usually be overcome by a couple of early nights or well-timed naps. Sleep can also protect us from infections, as it helps keep our immune system in good shape and may help control blood pressure. There is also increasing evidence of a link between adequate sleep and maintaining a healthy weight.

7–9 hours = amount of sleep most adults need each night

FLUIDS

HEALTHY TARGET: Most people need to drink at least 6–8 cups of fluid (1.5-2L) each day to keep hydrated. Water is always the best choice, but other drinks like milk, tea or coffee also contribute to your total fluids for the day.

HOW TO MEASURE: Take note of how much you drink over the course of a day and record it on the chart on p30. Simply measure how much your favourite cup or mug holds and work out roughly how much fluid you drink a day.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: The body needs water for digesting food, absorbing nutrients, excreting waste products and regulating body temperature.

Your needs also differ from day to day depending on the climate and your level of activity. Drink consistently throughout the day – by the time you feel thirsty you are already mildly dehydrated.

6–8 cups = minimum healthy fluid intake target each day



WEIGHT

HEALTHY TARGET: Your doctor or dietitian will be able to determine what is a healthy weight for you, but the 'what' and 'where' of weight are also important. The amount of muscle you have and where your fat sits (around your middle or thighs) should be considered when looking at your weight.

HOW TO MEASURE: If you have a set of scales, weigh yourself no more than once weekly (monthly is better). If you don't have scales, use your clothes as a measure – are they tighter or looser than normal? Your body mass index

[BMI – weight (kg) divided by height (m²)] is also useful as a general guideline and can be a quick and easy way to know if you need to make some changes. But remember, BMI is a less accurate indicator for some ethnic groups, older people and those who are very muscular (muscle is heavier by volume than fat).

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: Being overweight increases the risk of many illnesses – cancer, heart disease, diabetes... and the list goes on. Carrying too much weight can also make daily life difficult by causing breathlessness and aching joints.

BMI 18.5–24.9 = general healthy weight range

BLOOD PRESSURE

HEALTHY TARGET: Normal blood pressure is generally less than 120/80. The first number (systolic) is the pressure exerted when the heart pumps blood around the body. The second number (diastolic) indicates the pressure exerted when the heart relaxes and refills with blood.

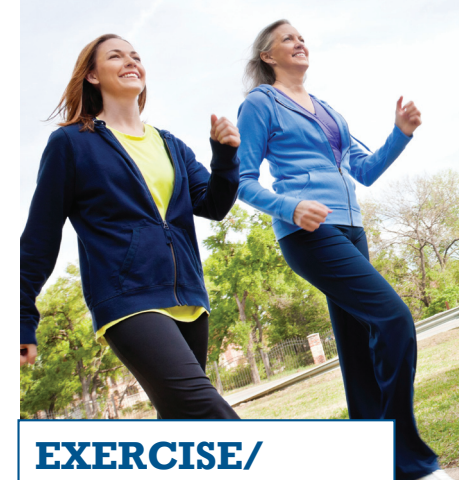
High blood pressure is considered to be a consistent reading of 140/90 over several weeks. It is the most common health issue managed by doctors in Australia.

HOW TO MEASURE: Blood pressure is measured using an inflatable cuff around your upper



arm. As the cuff deflates, a stethoscope is used to listen to the blood flowing through the arteries and veins in your arm. **WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:** High blood pressure rarely causes any short-term symptoms, but it can have worrying long-term effects. It is the greatest risk factor for heart disease, and increases your risk of heart attack and stroke.

120/80 or less = normal blood pressure



EXERCISE/ACTIVITY

HEALTHY TARGET: Anything is better than nothing – but the recommended amount is 30 minutes of 'moderate intensity activity' at least five days a week. This could include brisk walking, aqua aerobics or golf – any activity that boosts your heart rate, but not so high that you can't speak. Three 10-minute sessions count, too. Encourage children to aim for 60 minutes of activity each day.

HOW TO MEASURE: Write down how many minutes you move each day (use the chart on p30). Keeping track of your daily activity can be a great motivator.

If you need extra support, or have injuries or health problems, speak to your doctor or an exercise physiologist about creating a specific exercise plan for you.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: Being active benefits your long- and short-term physical and mental health. It reduces your risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers, as well as aiding digestion, helping you get more restful sleep and improving your mental well-being and confidence.

30 minutes or more = exercise each day

ALCOHOL INTAKE

WHAT IT SHOULD BE: The Australian Government recommends a maximum of two 'standard' drinks per day for both men and women and at least two alcohol-free days per week.

HOW TO MEASURE: A standard drink is either a 285ml glass of full-strength beer, a 150ml glass of wine or 30ml spirits. Keep a tally of how many drinks you have using the chart opposite. Watch your portion size – it's easy to have more than a standard drink in just one glass of wine. Check the bottle label as it will tell you how many standard drinks it contains.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT: Alcohol is a depressant and can be extremely damaging when consumed in excess. The health risks from alcohol increase progressively – meaning the more you drink, the greater the risk. It can damage your liver and brain, and increases your risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure and many cancers. It is also high in kilojoules, which contribute to weight gain and obesity. Any potential heart benefits are only gained if you stay within the recommended limits.

2 = maximum recommended number of 'standard' drinks per day

Other useful things to know

Family health history Some conditions are genetic, so make sure you know your family's health history. Additional screening may be offered if you have a family history of certain cancers or heart disease, for example.

Medications and allergies Know exactly which medications you take – 'small pink ones' won't help paramedics help you in an emergency. And tell the doctor or nurse if you are allergic to any medications.

Blood type Blood type is determined by the substances found on the surface of red blood cells. About 49 per cent of Australians are type O and 3 per cent are type AB. Both Type O and AB blood can be used to help others of any blood type in an emergency situation.

THE CHART

Photocopy and fill in this chart each week to keep track of your numbers.

WEEK ONE	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Number of standard alcoholic drinks each day							
Number of hours sleep a night							
Minutes of exercise each day							
Number of cups of fluid consumed each day							

WEEK TWO	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Number of standard alcoholic drinks each day							
Number of hours sleep a night							
Minutes of exercise each day							
Number of cups of fluid consumed each day							

WEEK THREE	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Number of standard alcoholic drinks each day							
Number of hours sleep a night							
Minutes of exercise each day							
Number of cups of fluid consumed each day							

WHAT TO DO IF THE NUMBERS ARE HIGH

As well as knowing your numbers, know how to use them. If you get less-than-positive results after getting tested, talk to your doctor about the next steps. Be prepared to make some changes and try not to worry – worrying may make the problem worse! Stress raises heart rate and blood pressure, and may interrupt your sleep. So set some health goals, seek support if you need it and work towards gradual improvement. **hfg**