

# Know your numbers for a healthier new year and body

**D**uring the holidays, people typically begin making resolutions for the New Year. Studies indicate that the most common resolutions are health-related.

Last year, did you set a health related goal for 2010? I did — and bet you did, too. I will again this year and I'd encourage you to. Even if things didn't go quite as planned — or if your plan didn't achieve your 2010 goals, don't let that discourage you. Like many things in life, success in healthy living often begins with failure before goals are obtained or maintained. For example, smokers who quit fail, on average, three times before succeeding.

To help you succeed this year, consider the following advice.

When you're starting a journey, you need to know where you are going — and how to get there. And, you'd want to have a clear destination, as well as a map, right? But neither of those things would do you much good if you were already lost — and you couldn't figure out where to begin.

So, this month's column focuses on knowing where you are right now. Being aware of your numbers in seven key areas will help determine your location on the health map and what direction you need to move in 2011.

**1. Blood Pressure:** Blood pressure is a combination of two numbers. The top number measures the pressure when your heart beats; the bottom number represents the number of beats when your heart relaxes. Normal blood pressure is around 120/80. When blood pressure is 140/90 (or higher), it's considered hypertension which can have serious health consequences.

Your blood pressure may vary greatly over the course of a day — as well as with, your level and type of activity. At a minimum, you should have your blood pressure checked annually, but more often is better. Home blood pressure machines make a good health related gift for holidays or birthdays. With one of these devices, you can take your pressure regularly. If it's consistently elevated,

discuss this with your doctor. Lowering high blood pressure is another worthy goal for 2011.

**2. Blood Sugar:** Blood sugar or glucose levels that are elevated lead to diabetes and related complications like heart disease and kidney problems. These levels rise and fall when we eat — and when we're active.

As a general rule, blood sugar readings need to be around 100. This number might be lower before you eat and a little higher afterward. If your blood sugar levels are consistently 125 or greater, you may be pre-diabetic or have a metabolic problem that needs to be addressed through increased exercise and changes to your eating habits.

At least once a year, you should have your blood sugar checked — or test it yourself with a home meter. Most often, blood sugar elevation doesn't appear suddenly; instead, it usually creeps up over time.

**3. Fats In The Blood:** Fat is not a bad thing. We all need a little of it for our bodies to function normally. And, cholesterol, a particular type of fat, isn't a bad thing in itself — but too much of it is. Total cholesterol should be less than 200. More than that means the fat in your blood puts you at risk for heart disease.

Triglycerides, another kind of fat, can be both good and bad. HDLs are the good kind — and help to protect our hearts when they are in the 40-50 range for men and in the 50-60 range for women. The bad kind, LDLs, ideally need to be lower than 100. The level of fat in your blood should be checked at least once a year.

**4. Height:** While you are not able to control how tall or short you are, your height is a factor in your health depending on your weight. As an adult, it's important to measure your height because it can change as a result of bone loss, wear in the joints of our spines, having poor posture, or not standing straight. After the age of 50, measure your height once a year.

**5 & 6. Weight & Waist:** While your weight according to the scale is not, in isolation, a good predictor of health, tracking your weight is important to ensuring that your health is good. Weigh yourself once a month — or at least annually for comparison. But, if you need to lose a few pounds, weighing yourself no more than once a week has been shown to help.

And even more important than weight is waist size. Men who have a circumference of more than 40 inches are at risk for chronic illness. For women, the warning indicator is a waist size in excess of 35 inches. To

check this, run a tape measure around your middle (at the level of belly button). Focusing on waist size, rather than weight, has been shown to have a more positive impact on health over time.

**7. Body Mass Index (BMI):** BMI is a formula that calculates your height-to-weight ratio. Online, you'll find many simple tables and calculators to figure this out for you. Generally, you want a BMI that's in the 20s. And, a rating in the low 20s is better than one in the high 20s. A BMI of 30 indicates that your weight is going to have an impact on your future health. If your BMI is in the 40s, then it's already having a negative impact. Reducing your BMI by a couple of points is realistic

over the course of year — and might be an New Year's resolution worth setting and keeping.

So there you have it. The seven key measures that help you assess your health. Do you know your numbers? If so, how do you stack up? Are your numbers better or worse than this time last year? Worse or better, good or bad, at least you know where you are — and know where you are beginning your journey for 2011.

Don't know your numbers? Then, you don't really know where you are on the health map. If so, the best (and first) New Year's resolution you can make is to find out where you stand in relationship to these key measures. Knowing your numbers tells you where you are and where you

need to go.

Did you know that it's been shown that, in the long run, you're better off knowing your numbers (even if they aren't as good as you'd like) than not knowing? Well, now you know.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2011 — from my family and me — to you and yours.

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