



Knowing Your Numbers



The American Heart Association recommends that everyone "know their numbers." What does that mean? Knowing your numbers refers to having your blood pressure, blood sugar and serum cholesterol checked on a regular basis. Just like knowing your weight and BMI, this is also baselining. When we know our starting numbers, we can easily note the progress we make as we participate in the Small Changes for Health program. These numbers can also assist us in making realistic goals based on our risk for chronic disease(s).

Here is a little information about each of the "numbers."

Blood Pressure: Your blood pressure is a measure of how effectively your heart is working and the general health of your blood vessels. It consists of a systolic pressure (the force in the arteries when the heart beats) over a diastolic pressure (the force in the arteries when the heart is at rest). There is a normal range that blood pressures should fall in. Pressures that are above this range may indicate **Hypertension** (high blood pressure), and may indicate an increased risk of **Heart Attack** or **Stroke**. The goal is a blood pressure of less than 120 mm/Hg (systolic) over less than 80 mm/Hg (diastolic).

Blood Sugar: Your blood sugar is a direct indication of how effectively your body is processing the sugar it obtains from foods, a key source of energy for the body. There are times when this measure is higher (like right after meals) and lower (like first thing in the morning before we eat). However, there is a "normal range" that blood sugars should typically fall in. Blood sugar levels outside of that range may be an indication of **Diabetes** or some other health concern. Fasting blood sugar levels at 126 mg/dL or higher may indicate Diabetes.

Serum Cholesterol: This screening only measures total cholesterol. A more detailed screening will also measure your HDL cholesterol (the "good" cholesterol), LDL cholesterol (the "bad" cholesterol) and your serum triglycerides. If your serum cholesterol is high, you may want to have a more detailed screening done at your doctor's office to determine your **Cardiovascular disease** risks. The goal is a total serum cholesterol of less than 200 mg/dL. Other goals include HDL cholesterol that is 60 mg/dL or higher, LDL cholesterol that is 100 mg/dL or lower and triglycerides that are less than 200 mg/dL.

