

Survey finds most don't know the numbers that help predict heart disease

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Laxmi Mehta, MD, a cardiologist at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, says it's important to know your numbers for predictors of heart disease like blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose and weight, and to discuss any necessary interventions with your doctor. Credit: The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

Keeping track of blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels can help identify risk factors for heart disease. However, a national survey by The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center found that while many adults know their childhood address or best friend's birthday, less than half know their blood pressure or ideal weight, and fewer than 1 in 5 know their cholesterol or blood sugar levels.

"Recognizing [heart disease risk factors](#) early and adequately treating them can potentially prevent heart attacks, strokes and heart failure. As a society, we need to shift from sick care to preventative care so people can live their best and fullest lives possible," said Laxmi Mehta, MD, director of Preventative Cardiology and Women's Cardiovascular Health at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and Sarah Ross Soter Endowed Chair in Women's Cardiovascular Health Research.

The survey asked more than 1,000 adults nationwide if they knew their blood pressure, ideal weight, [cholesterol](#) or [blood sugar levels](#). When it came to these key heart health tests, the highest number (44%) knew their ideal weight ([body mass index](#) or BMI) and the fewest (15%) knew their blood sugar level. In comparison, 68% knew their childhood address and 58% knew their best friend's birthday.

"Most people associate diabetes with either their [family history](#) or being overweight, and they don't make the connection that it's associated with heart disease. People with diabetes are twice as likely to have heart disease or stroke than people without heart disease. And women with diabetes are at a higher risk for heart disease than men," Mehta said.

While the survey found many Americans don't know these health numbers off the top of their heads, they are having them regularly checked. The majority said they had their blood pressure and heart rate checked within the last year and blood sugar and cholesterol tests within five years.

"Most people can get screened at their physician's office or, if they don't have one, there are free health screening fairs as well as blood pressure machines at pharmacies," Mehta said. "It's important to not only know your numbers but be proactive with medication and [lifestyle changes](#) like diet and exercise. When you visit your doctor, ask what your numbers are for blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar and what a normal range is for you. Discuss your [sleep habits](#) along with diet, exercise, smoking and alcohol use. Also, none of us like to talk about our own weight but it's an important conversation because being overweight is a risk factor for heart disease."



Erica Hutson learned her high cholesterol is likely driven by genetics. After working with her doctor to control her cholesterol through medication and healthy habits, she hopes it will encourage her children to be proactive about

their heart health risks. Credit: The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

What are your healthy heart numbers?

- Blood pressure. The systolic or top number should be under 120 mm Hg and the diastolic or bottom number should be under 80 mm Hg.
- Blood sugar. After fasting for eight hours, blood sugar should be less than 100 mg/dL or a hemoglobin A1C of less than 5.7.
- Cholesterol. Talk to your health care professional about what the recommended range of LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol and triglycerides is for you and how this impacts your heart risk.
- Body mass index (BMI). A normal range is between 18.5 and 24.9.
- Sleep: Aim for an average of seven to nine hours of sleep a day.

"It's also important to know your family's health history and discuss it with your doctor. There could be risk factors that require medication or lifestyle changes and the earlier they're known, the better. Sometimes people have heart attacks or strokes because their [blood pressure](#) or cholesterol levels are really high and they never had them checked," Mehta said.

A family history of high cholesterol

Erica Hutson, 37, of Plain City was in her 20s when she found out she had high cholesterol through a health check required by insurance. Because she was young and fit, she didn't do anything about it for 10 years. She changed her mind about it when her father died of coronary artery disease when he was in his 60s and she discovered it ran in the family.

"His death really made me think about things and put my life into a whole different perspective," she said.

Hutson's doctor put her on cholesterol medicine but her numbers were still high so she started seeing Wesley Milks, MD, who specializes in lipid disorders at the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center. He added a shot to her statin therapy that is self-injected at home every couple of weeks. Her cholesterol levels are back in the healthy range.

"It's really important to know what your numbers are, what they mean and consult with your doctor. You need to know what your family history is on both sides so you can give that information to your children and all family members can be prepared to do what it takes to stay healthy," said Hutson, who has two young children.

Survey methodology

This study was conducted on behalf of The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center by SSRS on its Opinion Panel Omnibus platform. The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is a national, twice-per-month, probability-based survey. Data collection was conducted from Dec. 15-17, 2023 among a sample of 1,010 respondents.

The survey was conducted via web (n=980) and telephone (n=30) and administered in English. The margin of error for total respondents is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All SSRS Opinion

Panel Omnibus data are weighted to represent the target population of U.S. adults ages 18 or older.

Provided by Ohio State University Medical Center

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