

Measuring Health and Fitness

When you go for a checkup with your doctor or health care provider, it seems like the doctor and his or her staff take lots of measurements—your height, your weight, your vision, your blood pressure. They may even ask for a blood or urine sample to measure your current health. For each of these measurements, there is a normal range for results. If your results fall outside that range—that is, if the numbers are too high or low—the doctor will often suggest how you can try to improve your health.

Two types of measurements can tell your doctor—and you—a lot about your physical fitness. They can also help determine an exercise plan that's right for you. The first is heart rate. Your heart beats more slowly when you're resting and faster when you're exercising. The point of most (aerobic) exercise is to speed up your heart rate and to keep the heart beating within a certain range—not too high and not too low. If you do this correctly, you'll receive some health benefits. You'll need to know three numbers: your resting heart rate, your maximum heart rate, and your target heart rate.

After determining and recording these numbers, you can expect them to change the more you exercise. For example, as your aerobic fitness increases, your resting heart rate will go down. When you first start doing aerobic exercise, aim for the lowest part of your target heart-rate zone. After six or more months of regular exercise, you may be able to exercise comfortably at a higher level.



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Your blood pressure, height, and weight are examples of measurements that your doctor uses to keep track of your health.

The second important measure of fitness is body mass index, or BMI. This is an estimate of how much body fat you have in relation to your height and weight. There are different BMI charts for boys and girls and for different ages. This is because the amount of body fat differs between girls and boys, and it changes with age.

It is important to have your doctor perform regular fitness measurements. That way, you will know that the results are accurate and can discuss what they mean. For example, an accurate BMI can help identify whether you're overweight and at risk of developing more serious medical problems, like high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or diabetes. Your doctor can help you keep track of your weight and recommend healthier eating and appropriate exercise.