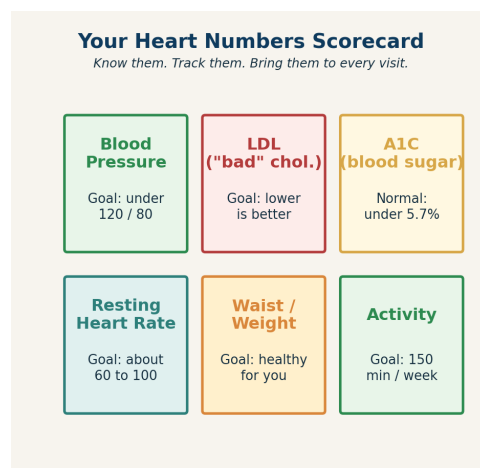


Know Your Heart Numbers

A Simple Scorecard for the Numbers That Protect Your Heart

A few numbers tell most of the story of your heart health. This guide shows what each one means, the general goal, and which way is good - so you can track them and bring them to every visit.



Online: <https://go.riasalimd.com/heart-numbers-guide>

Rias KS Ali, MD FACC

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Last Updated: August 2026



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Names & Terms You Will Hear

Term	Meaning
Blood Pressure (BP)	The force of blood pushing on your artery walls. Written as two numbers, like 120 over 80. Normal is under 120 over 80.
Cholesterol	A waxy fat in your blood. The lipid panel measures LDL (the bad kind), HDL (the good kind), and triglycerides.
LDL Cholesterol	The "bad" cholesterol that builds plaque in arteries. Lower is better. Your goal depends on your risk.
HDL Cholesterol	The "good" cholesterol that clears plaque away. Higher is better - aim for 40 or more (men), 50 or more (women).
Triglycerides	Another blood fat, mostly from food and extra calories. Aim for under 150.
A1C	A blood test that shows your average blood sugar over about 3 months. Under 5.7% is normal.
Blood Sugar (Glucose)	The amount of sugar in your blood right now. A1C gives the longer-term average.
BMI (Body Mass Index)	A number from your height and weight that estimates body fat. A healthy range is under 25 for most adults.
Waist Size	The distance around your belly. A large waist raises heart risk even at a normal weight.
Resting Heart Rate	How many times your heart beats per minute at rest. Most adults fall between 60 and 100.
Life's Essential 8	The AHA list of the 8 things that drive heart health: diet, activity, no nicotine, sleep, weight, cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure.
Prevention	Steps you take to STOP heart disease before it starts. Knowing and acting on your numbers is the heart of prevention.



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Three things to remember about your numbers:

1. **Most are silent** - you can feel fine with a number out of range. A test is the only way to know.
2. **Know which way is good** - lower for blood pressure, LDL, triglycerides, and A1C; higher for HDL and activity.
3. **Your doctor sets YOUR target** - the general goals here are a starting point, not a one-size-fits-all rule.



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Know Your Heart Numbers?

- Your "heart numbers" are a small set of measurements that, together, tell most of the story of your heart health. A few numbers - tracked over time - say a lot.
- The core numbers are: blood pressure, cholesterol (LDL, HDL, and triglycerides), blood sugar (A1C), body weight or waist size, and resting heart rate.
- There are also "lifestyle numbers" you can act on: minutes of activity each week, hours of sleep each night, how much salt you eat, and whether you use any nicotine.
- The American Heart Association groups these into Life's Essential 8 - the eight things that most drive heart health. Four are habits (diet, activity, no nicotine, sleep). Four are numbers (weight, cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure).
- Most of these numbers cause no symptoms when they drift out of range. You can have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or high blood sugar and feel completely fine. A test is the only way to know.
- For each number there is a general goal - but YOUR personal target is set by your doctor, based on your age, your other numbers, and your overall risk.
- The point of this guide is simple: know your numbers, write them down, learn which way is good, and bring them to every visit. Then act on the one or two that need work.

Your Heart Numbers, at a Glance		
NUMBER	YOUR GOAL	GOOD MEANS
Blood Pressure	Under 120 / 80	lower the top number
LDL "bad" cholesterol	Lower is better*	lower
HDL "good" cholesterol	Men 40+, Women 50+	higher
Triglycerides	Under 150	lower
A1C (blood sugar)	Under 5.7%	lower
Waist size	Healthy for you	smaller
Resting heart rate	About 60 to 100	in range
Activity each week	About 150 minutes	more
Sleep each night	About 7 to 9 hours	in range

* LDL target depends on your risk. Your doctor sets your personal goal for every number here.

Your heart numbers at a glance: each number, its general goal, and which way is good. Green means in a healthy range; warmer colors mean a number to watch. Your doctor sets your personal goal for every line here. Sources: AHA Life's Essential 8, 2017 ACC/AHA blood pressure guideline, ADA A1C ranges.

The heart-numbers dashboard - what to track and where to go deeper



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Number	General goal*	Which way is good	Go deeper
Blood pressure	Under 120 / 80	Lower the top number	Blood Pressure guide; Home Monitoring guide
LDL "bad" cholesterol	Lower is better (target by risk)	Lower	Cholesterol guide
HDL "good" cholesterol	Men 40+, Women 50+	Higher	Cholesterol guide
Triglycerides	Under 150	Lower	Cholesterol guide
A1C (blood sugar)	Under 5.7% (normal)	Lower	Diabetes & the Heart guide
Weight / waist	Healthy range for you	Smaller waist	Heart-Healthy Eating guide
Resting heart rate	About 60 to 100	Steady, in range	Ask your doctor
Activity / sleep	150 min / week; 7 to 9 hours / night	More activity; steady sleep	Heart-Healthy Eating guide



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Why It Matters

- Knowing and tracking your numbers - and acting on them - is one of the most powerful things you can do for your heart. It catches problems early, while they are still easy to fix.
- Most heart attacks and strokes trace back to a handful of numbers that drifted out of range over years: blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar, plus weight, activity, and smoking.
- These numbers are silent. High blood pressure is called the "silent killer" because it causes no symptoms until it has already harmed the heart, brain, or kidneys. The same is true for high cholesterol and high blood sugar.
- Small, steady improvements add up. Lowering the top blood-pressure number, dropping LDL cholesterol, or trimming your A1C each cuts your long-term risk - and doing all three together cuts it more.
- Tracking turns a single snapshot into a trend. One reading can be off. A list of readings over time shows whether a change is working and helps your doctor adjust your plan.
- When you bring your numbers to a visit, the conversation gets better. You and your doctor can focus on the one or two numbers that need attention instead of starting from scratch each time.
- Each number has its own deep-dive guide in our library. This guide is the map; the others are the detail.



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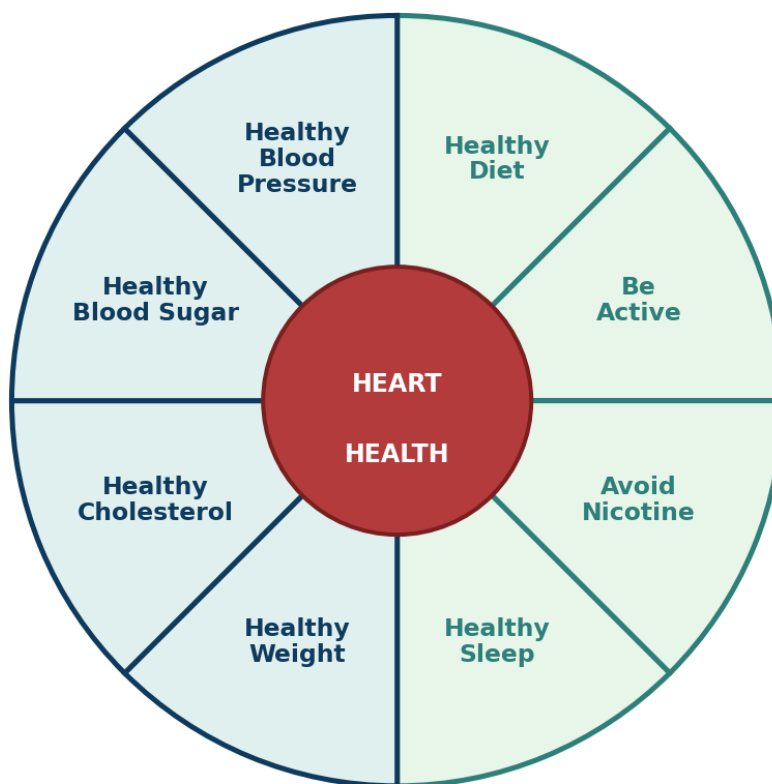
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Life's Essential 8

The 8 things that drive heart health



Teal = your habits

Navy = your numbers

Life's Essential 8 - the AHA's eight drivers of heart health. Four are daily habits (teal): healthy diet, activity, avoiding nicotine, and good sleep. Four are numbers (navy): weight, cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure. Working on any one helps; working on several helps most. Source: AHA Life's Essential 8 (Circulation, 2022).



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Your Core Numbers (Blood Pressure, Cholesterol, A1C)

- **Blood pressure.** Written as two numbers (top over bottom). Normal is under 120 over 80. High blood pressure starts at 130 over 80. It is the "silent killer" - no symptoms, big risk. See our blood pressure guide: <https://go.riasalimd.com/htn-guide>.
- **LDL cholesterol (the "bad" one).** It builds plaque in arteries. Lower is better, and your target depends on your overall risk - your doctor sets it.
- **HDL cholesterol (the "good" one).** It clears cholesterol away. Higher is better: aim for 40 or more (men) and 50 or more (women).
- **Triglycerides.** Another blood fat. Aim for under 150. Cutting sugar, alcohol, and extra calories helps. See our cholesterol guide: <https://go.riasalimd.com/cholesterol-guide>.
- **A1C (blood sugar).** Shows your average blood sugar over about 3 months. Under 5.7% is normal; 5.7 to 6.4% is prediabetes; 6.5% or higher is diabetes. See our diabetes guide: <https://go.riasalimd.com/diabetes-heart-guide>.
- These three - blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar - drive most heart attacks and strokes. They are the heart of your dashboard.



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Your Lifestyle Numbers (Life's Essential 8 Habits)

- **Activity.** Aim for about 150 minutes of moderate activity each week - 30 minutes, 5 days a week. Brisk walking counts. More movement lowers several numbers at once.
- **Sleep.** Aim for about 7 to 9 hours a night. Short or broken sleep raises blood pressure and blood sugar over time.
- **Sodium (salt).** Most adults should aim for under 2,300 mg a day - about 1 teaspoon of salt. Lower is better for blood pressure. Most salt hides in packaged and restaurant food.
- **No nicotine.** Any smoking or vaping raises blood pressure and heart rate and harms arteries. Quitting improves the most numbers at once - ask us for help.
- **Healthy eating.** A Mediterranean or DASH pattern - more vegetables, fruit, beans, whole grains, and fish - improves blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and weight together. See our eating guide: <https://go.riasalimd.com/heart-healthy-eating-guide>.
- **Weight and waist.** A healthy weight, and a smaller waist, lowers blood pressure, blood sugar, and triglycerides. Even a 5 to 10 pound loss helps.
- These are the four behaviors in Life's Essential 8 plus weight. They are numbers you control day to day.



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Tracking It - Build Your Dashboard, Bring It to Visits

- Make a simple list with three columns: the number, the date, and your goal. Add a new line each time you get a reading.
- Pick a home for it: a note on your phone, a card in your wallet, or a sheet on the fridge. The best dashboard is the one you will actually use.
- Start with what you have. Your last office blood pressure, your last lab report, your weight - fill in the rest over time.
- Check your blood pressure at home if your doctor asks. Home readings often guide care better than office readings alone. See our home-monitoring guide: <https://go.riasalimd.com/home-bp-guide>.
- Note your goal next to each number so you always know which way to aim. Your doctor sets these targets with you.
- Bring your list - or a photo of it - to every visit. It makes the conversation faster, more personal, and more focused on what needs work.
- Review the trend, not just the latest number. Ask: is this number moving toward my goal? That is the question that drives real progress.



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Risk Factors

Some patients are more likely to develop this condition. Knowing your risk helps your care team take extra precautions.

Risk Factor	Why It Increases Risk
Family history of heart disease	If a parent or sibling had an early heart attack or stroke, your numbers matter even more. Start tracking sooner and aim for tighter goals.
High blood pressure that runs in the family	Blood pressure tends to run in families and rise with age. Check it regularly, even if you feel fine.
Diabetes or prediabetes	High blood sugar damages arteries and raises every other heart risk. Knowing your A1C is a cornerstone of the dashboard.
Carrying extra weight, especially at the waist	Belly fat raises blood pressure, blood sugar, and triglycerides all at once. Waist size is an easy number to watch at home.
Smoking or any nicotine use	Nicotine raises blood pressure and heart rate and damages arteries. Quitting improves several numbers at once.
Being inactive	Too little activity nudges blood pressure, blood sugar, weight, and cholesterol the wrong way. About 150 minutes a week helps all of them.
Poor sleep	Short or broken sleep raises blood pressure and blood sugar over time. Aim for about 7 to 9 hours.
Older age	Risk rises with age, so numbers that were fine at 40 may need attention at 60. Tracking shows the trend early.



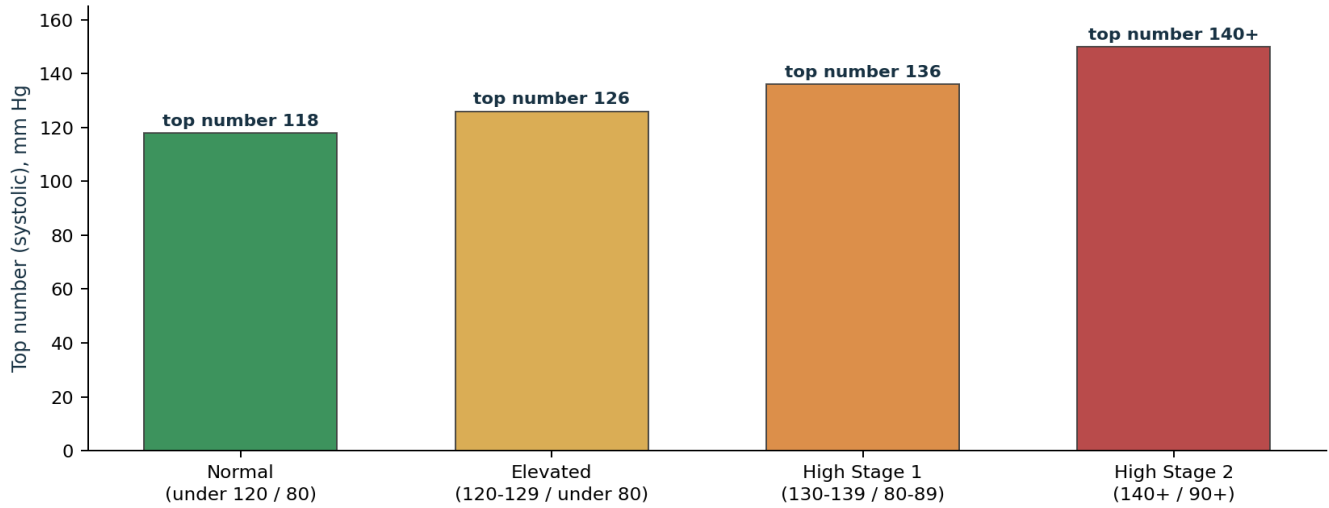
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Blood Pressure Categories: Where Does Yours Land?



Blood pressure is the headline heart number. Normal is under 120 over 80. Elevated is 120 to 129 on top with under 80 on the bottom. High blood pressure (stage 1) starts at 130 over 80. Your doctor sets your personal target. Source: 2017 ACC/AHA high blood pressure guideline.



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Treatment Options

- **Step 1 - Get your numbers.** Ask for a blood-pressure check, a lipid panel (cholesterol), and an A1C or blood-sugar test. Note your weight, waist size, and resting heart rate too.
- **Step 2 - Write them down.** Keep a simple list: the number, the date, and your goal. A note on your phone or a card in your wallet works. See the dashboard you can copy later in this guide.
- **Step 3 - Learn which way is good.** For most numbers, lower is better (blood pressure, LDL, triglycerides, A1C). For HDL and activity minutes, higher is better. For heart rate and sleep, you want a healthy range.
- **Step 4 - Pick one or two to work on.** You do not have to fix everything at once. Choose the number furthest from goal and start there. Small wins build momentum.
- **Step 5 - Use the habits.** The Life's Essential 8 habits - healthy eating, activity, no nicotine, and good sleep - improve several numbers at the same time. See our heart-healthy eating guide: <https://go.riasalimd.com/heart-healthy-eating-guide>.
- **Step 6 - Add medicine when needed.** When habits are not enough, your doctor may add a blood-pressure pill, a statin, or a diabetes medicine. These work WITH your habits, not instead of them.
- **Step 7 - Recheck and adjust.** Numbers change. Recheck after any new medicine or big lifestyle change, then on the schedule your doctor sets. Bring your list every time.
- **Step 8 - Go deeper on each number.** Use the linked guides below for blood pressure, cholesterol, home monitoring, and diabetes when you are ready to learn more about a specific number.

Your one-page dashboard. Copy this onto a card or phone note:

Blood pressure: ____ / ____ (goal under 120 / 80)

LDL: ____ HDL: ____ Triglycerides: ____

A1C: ____% (normal under 5.7%)

Weight / waist: ____ Resting heart rate: ____

Activity: ____ min/week Sleep: ____ hrs/night

Bring this to every visit.



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Comfort Measures at Home (No Medication Needed)

These simple steps support healing and ease symptoms. Use them alongside any medication your doctor prescribes.

- Build your dashboard once, then keep it handy. A note on your phone, a wallet card, or a sheet on the fridge all work.
- Check your blood pressure at home if your doctor asks. Home readings often guide care better than office readings alone. See our home-monitoring guide: <https://go.riasalimd.com/home-bp-guide>.
- Aim for about 150 minutes of activity each week - that is 30 minutes, 5 days a week. Brisk walking counts. Any movement is better than none.
- Aim for about 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. A steady bedtime helps your blood pressure and blood sugar.
- Watch the salt. Most adults should aim for less than 2,300 mg of sodium a day (about 1 teaspoon of salt) - and lower is better for blood pressure.
- If you use any nicotine, ask us about quitting. It is the single step that improves the most numbers at once. We can help.
- Bring your list to every visit. Even a photo of your home readings or your last lab report helps us help you.



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Risks, Benefits, and Alternatives

Every choice has trade-offs. Use this table to start the shared decision conversation.

Option	Risks	Benefits	Alternatives
Know and track your numbers	Takes a little time and effort. Seeing a number out of range can feel worrying at first.	Catches silent problems early. Turns single readings into a trend. Makes every visit more useful and your plan more personal.	Not tracking - but then problems are usually found late, often after damage is done.
Lifestyle changes (the habits)	Slower to show results - weeks to months. Takes ongoing effort and support.	Improves several numbers at once with no medicine side effects. Also helps mood, energy, and sleep.	Adding medicine if habits alone do not reach your goals. They work best together.
Medicine when a number needs it	Possible side effects; sometimes more than one is needed. Means regular rechecks.	Brings a stubborn number to goal and lowers long-term risk of heart attack and stroke. Often a few pills do a lot.	Higher doses of lifestyle change first, or a different medicine if side effects occur. Your doctor tailors this.
Do nothing for now	Numbers drift further out of range silently. The first sign may be a heart attack or stroke.	No effort or cost today.	Even small steps - one number, one habit - lower risk. Starting beats waiting.



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Common Misconceptions

Myth	Reality
"I feel fine, so my numbers must be fine."	High blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar usually cause NO symptoms. Feeling well does not mean your numbers are in range. A test is the only way to know.
"There are too many numbers to keep track of."	You only need a short list: blood pressure, cholesterol, A1C, weight or waist, and resting heart rate. One card or phone note holds them all.
"One bad reading means something is wrong."	Numbers bounce around. One high reading can be from stress, a big meal, or a poor night's sleep. The trend over time matters far more than any single value.
"If I take medicine, I do not need to track anymore."	Tracking is how you and your doctor know the medicine is working and at the right dose. Keep your list going even after you start treatment.
"My doctor checks my numbers, so I do not need to."	When you know and bring your own numbers, the visit is faster and more focused. You become a partner in your care, not just a passenger.
"There is one normal number that is right for everyone."	General goals exist, but YOUR personal target depends on your age, your other numbers, and your overall risk. Your doctor sets it with you.
"Lowering one number is all that matters."	The numbers work together. Blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar each add to your risk - and improving all of them helps far more than fixing just one.



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Possible Complications

Knowing what can go wrong helps you spot problems early. Most complications are uncommon, especially with treatment.

Where / What	What Can Happen
Heart and arteries	Numbers left out of range for years lead to heart attack, coronary artery disease, and heart failure. These are the most common results of unmanaged blood pressure and cholesterol.
Brain	High blood pressure and high cholesterol are leading causes of stroke. Tracking and treating them is one of the best ways to protect your brain.
Kidneys	High blood pressure and high blood sugar slowly damage the kidneys, often with no symptoms until late. Your numbers warn you first.
Eyes and nerves	High blood sugar can harm the small vessels in the eyes and the nerves in the feet. Keeping A1C in range helps prevent this.
Whole-body risk	Because the numbers overlap, an out-of-range result rarely travels alone. Catching one early often means catching others before they cause harm.

A note from Dr. Ali. The numbers in this guide are among the few heart-disease risks we can measure cheaply, change with simple steps, and prove make a difference. You do not have to fix everything at once. Pick the one number furthest from goal, work on it, then move to the next. Knowing your numbers and acting on them is one of the most powerful things you can do for your heart.



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Points to Know

If you remember nothing else, remember these key points.

- Your heart numbers are a short list: blood pressure, cholesterol (LDL, HDL, triglycerides), A1C, weight or waist, and resting heart rate.
- Most are silent. You can feel fine with numbers out of range - a test is the only way to know.
- General goals: blood pressure under 120 over 80; LDL lower is better; A1C under 5.7%; triglycerides under 150.
- Lifestyle numbers matter too: about 150 minutes of activity a week, about 7 to 9 hours of sleep, lower salt, and no nicotine.
- Your doctor sets YOUR personal target for each number, based on your risk.
- Know which way is good: lower for blood pressure, LDL, triglycerides, and A1C; higher for HDL and activity.
- Track over time. A trend tells you far more than any single reading.
- Write your numbers down and bring them to every visit - it makes your care more personal and your plan stronger.
- Knowing and acting on your numbers is one of the most powerful things you can do to prevent heart disease.



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When to Call Us - and When to Call 911

If you are not sure, call. We would rather hear from you twice than miss a real problem.

- **Call 911** for chest pressure or pain, trouble breathing, weakness on one side, trouble speaking, a sudden bad headache, or fainting. These are heart-attack and stroke warning signs - do not wait to check a number.
- **Call our office (727-943-5200)** if a home blood-pressure reading is 180 or higher on top OR 120 or higher on the bottom, even without symptoms. Recheck after 5 minutes first.
- **Call us** if you have never had your blood pressure, cholesterol, or blood sugar checked - we can set up the right tests for your age and risk.
- **Call us** if your last lipid panel or A1C was more than a year ago, or if it has been a while since your numbers were reviewed.
- **Call us** if a home number suddenly changes a lot, or if you are not sure what your personal goal should be.
- **Bring your list to every visit** - or send us a photo of your home readings before your appointment so we can review the trend.

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See also: our deep-dive guides for each number.

[High Blood Pressure](#) · [Home Blood Pressure Monitoring](#) · [Understanding Cholesterol](#) · [Diabetes & the Heart](#) · [Heart-Healthy Eating](#).



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Trusted Resources

The links below are the trusted resources Dr. Ali used to write this guide and that he recommends you visit for more information. Each is a clickable link in the digital version and a Short.io tracked URL on the printed version.

- [AHA - Life's Essential 8 \(heart.org\)](https://heart.org) - The official AHA page on the eight things that drive heart health, with a free way to score yourself.
- [Cleveland Clinic - Know Your Numbers](#) - Plain-language target ranges for blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and weight, and how often to check them.
- [NIH MedlinePlus - How to Prevent Heart Disease](#) - Federal patient resource tying your key numbers to simple prevention steps, with Spanish-language versions.
- [ADA - Understanding A1C](#) - What the A1C test means and the ranges for normal, prediabetes, and diabetes.
- [ASCVD Risk Estimator Plus \(ACC\)](#) - A free, AHA/ACC tool that turns several of your numbers into a 10-year heart-attack and stroke risk estimate.
- [CDC - Heart Disease Prevention](#) - Government overview of the numbers and habits that lower heart risk, with simple action steps.



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Sources Used to Build This Guide

Every recommendation in this guide is grounded in one or more of the studies, guidelines, or trusted resources below. Short links are tracked so Dr. Ali can see which references patients are reading; nothing personally identifying is captured.

- [American Heart Association — Life's Essential 8](#) [Patient Education]
Authoritative framework for the eight things that most drive heart health: diet, physical activity, nicotine avoidance, sleep, weight (BMI), cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure. Sets the dashboard structure.
- [AHA — Life's Essential 8 Presidential Advisory \(Circulation 2022\)](#) [Guideline]
The scientific advisory defining each metric and scoring (BP optimal under 120/80, sleep 7-9 hours, BMI under 25, non-HDL cholesterol, A1C). Source for the targets the dashboard uses.
- [Cleveland Clinic — Numbers to Know for Heart Health](#) [Patient Education]
Plain-language overview of target ranges for blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and weight, and how often to check them.
- [MedlinePlus — How to Prevent Heart Disease](#) [Patient Education]
NIH/NLM overview tying the key risk-factor numbers to prevention actions, to anchor the dashboard framing.
- [2017 ACC/AHA High Blood Pressure Guideline](#) [Guideline]
Defines the blood-pressure categories used in the dashboard: normal under 120/80, elevated 120-129 over under 80, and high (stage 1) at 130/80 or higher.
- [2018 AHA/ACC Cholesterol Guideline](#) [Guideline]
Basis for the cholesterol targets the dashboard summarizes: LDL lower is better, with risk-tiered LDL targets and HDL / triglyceride framing.
- [2019 ACC/AHA Guideline on the Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease](#) [Guideline]
Authoritative basis for risk-factor targets, risk estimation, and shared decision-making that the heart-numbers dashboard summarizes.
- [American Diabetes Association — Understanding A1C](#) [Patient Education]
Source for the A1C thresholds in the dashboard: normal under 5.7%, prediabetes 5.7 to 6.4%, diabetes 6.5% or higher.



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About This Guide

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Version: 2026-08-15

Reviewer note: Reviewed the AHA Life's Essential 8 page, Cleveland Clinic "Know Your Numbers," and NIH MedlinePlus prevention pages. This guide adds: a one-page heart-numbers scorecard; a Life's Essential 8 wheel; a which-way-is-good column for every number; and direct links to our deep-dive guides for each number.

Disclaimer

This guide is for educational purposes only and does not replace medical advice from your physician. Recommendations may not apply to every patient. Always follow the specific instructions of Dr. Ali and your care team. In an emergency call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.



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