



## LEAD WITH YOUR HEART:

# Three Heart Health Screenings To Keep Your Ticker Tocking



Prevention is key for overall health, especially when it comes to your heart. Your heart pumps life throughout your body as it circulates oxygen-rich blood to your organs, limbs, brain, and tissues. That's why keeping your heart healthy is a high priority for your primary care provider (PCP).

Healthcare has evolved to recognize risk factors for diseases that enable doctors to perform screenings, detect illnesses early which can improve and extend one's lifespan. A lot of these routine screenings are for heart health. Your PCP probably performs several of them at your annual exam, but your personal circumstances and your age may necessitate a visit to a cardiologist. Here are some common heart health screenings you may need:

### BLOOD PRESSURE

Every time you go to the doctor, you can count on your blood pressure being taken—no matter your age. High blood pressure often presents without symptoms. Without checking your blood pressure, high blood pressure can remain undetected go unchecked leading to wear and tear on your heart and blood vessels. Untreated high blood pressure increases your risk for heart attack, stroke, heart disease, and more.

Normal blood pressure is 120/80 mm Hg or lower. Blood pressure lower than 90/60 mm Hg is considered low blood pressure, while there are two stages of high blood pressure.

**Stage 1 is 130-139/80 mm Hg and stage 2 is 140+/90+ mm Hg.** Your doctor may prescribe medication to control your blood pressure based on your risk factors at either stage, but you might start with lifestyle changes if you're diagnosed with stage 1.

**STAGE 1**  
130-139/80 mm Hg

**STAGE 2**  
140+/90+ mm Hg

If you have high blood pressure or you just want to keep a close eye on your health, you can also check your blood pressure at home. You can find a home blood pressure monitor at many different stores near you or online. If you participate in the Health Care FSA program through Optum Financial, blood pressure monitors are covered expenses.



### FOLLOW THE MOUSE:

We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

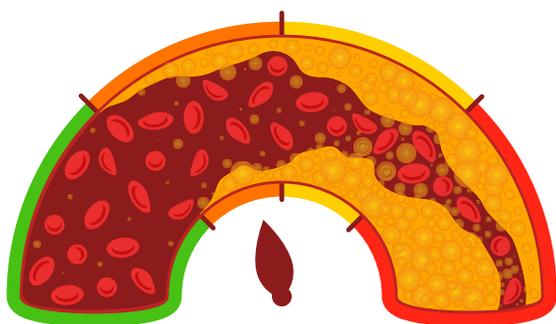
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### CHOLESTEROL

Getting your cholesterol checked is easy. Your PCP or another doctor can order a cholesterol blood test for you. You'll need to get blood drawn so a lab can calculate the amount of high and low-density cholesterol in your blood.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol is known as the "good" cholesterol because it helps remove other forms of cholesterol from your bloodstream and takes it to your liver where it can be removed from your body. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) can eventually build up within the walls of your blood vessels and narrow the passageways. Sometimes a clot can form and get stuck in the narrowed space, causing a heart attack or stroke. This is why LDL cholesterol is often referred to as "bad" cholesterol. Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood. Your high-density cholesterol should be higher than 60 mg/dL and low density below 100 mg/dL. Together, these numbers make up your total cholesterol and shouldn't exceed 200 mg/dL.



**GOOD** ■■■■■■ **BAD**

Adults should monitor their cholesterol regularly. For most, that means once every 4 to 6 years, but others may need more frequent monitoring. Talk to your doctor to figure out how often you need to check your cholesterol.

### STRESS TEST



You might need a [stress test](#) if you're experiencing worrisome cardiovascular symptoms. It's also a good idea before surgery, if you have a heart condition, or have risk factors for heart disease. A stress test will tell your doctor how your heart operates when it's working hard—but it isn't something most people need. Your doctor will order a stress test only if they think it's necessary.



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During a stress test, you will wear sensors for an electrocardiogram (ECG) and a blood pressure cuff. An ECG measures the electricity in your heart to make sure it's working properly. It's a good way for your doctor to identify heart health concerns before ordering more in-depth tests.

# NURTURING A PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR PCP

Your partnership with your primary care provider (PCP) is your first line of defense against heart disease and other hereditary illnesses. However, their ability to help is influenced by what you share. Your PCP can measure your blood pressure and heart rate, but they won't know to investigate more personal symptoms unless you talk to them about what you are experiencing—they are your partner on the journey to a heart-healthy lifestyle!

Do you have intermittent chest pain? **Talk to your PCP.**

Have you noticed you're experiencing heart palpitations? **Talk to your PCP.**

Are you getting winded from a flight or two of stairs? **Talk to your PCP.**

Anything different or alarming about your heart is a conversation you should have with your PCP.

On the flip side, it's easy to feel intimidated by healthcare professionals. Aside from them being highly educated medical experts, some people find themselves fighting against a provider who isn't practicing thorough care. If you find yourself on the receiving end of dismissive care, there are a few things you can do to find a better partner for your healthcare:

**1. Seek out a second opinion.** There are many different doctors who provide primary and specialty care. If you're seeing one who you disagree with, use the BCBSIL Provider finder tool to find another for a second, third, or even fourth opinion. You won't regret ensuring you get the best possible care—even if the first provider you see isn't a good match for your needs.

**2. Do your research.** Arrive at your doctor's appointment with research in hand. Learn what you can about your diagnosis and be prepared with questions. And if you're able, diving into studies about your condition can help shed light on newer treatment options that may improve your quality of life. Remember, you want your doctor to be your partner. Arriving at your appointment prepared, with research in hand helps support a partnership dynamic.

**3. Ask for a patient advocate.** Feeling unsure or intimidated about advocating for yourself? You don't have to do it alone if you're in need of complex care. [The Joint Commission](#) recommends you ask for a patient advocate to join you at your appointment. They can't make decisions for you, but they can help you gather the information you need to make informed decisions about your care.



Developing a partnership with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) helps you both choose the best course of action for your health. You should talk to them about even the smallest thing that doesn't feel right and have the conversation about heart health and screenings that are right for you. **If you do not have a PCP, you may call the Health Advocate number on your BCBSIL member ID card or log on to Blue Access for Members<sup>SM</sup> (BAM<sup>SM</sup>) [bcbsil.com](https://www.bcbsil.com) and use the Provider Finder.** This fast, easy-to-use tool improves members' experience when searching for in-network health care providers.



**SOURCES:** [JointCommission.org](https://www.jointcommission.org), [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), [Heart.org](https://www.heart.org) (low blood pressure), [Heart.org](https://www.heart.org) (blood pressure readings), [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) (cholesterol), [ClevelandClinic.org](https://www.clevelandclinic.org), [MedlinePlus.gov](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus)