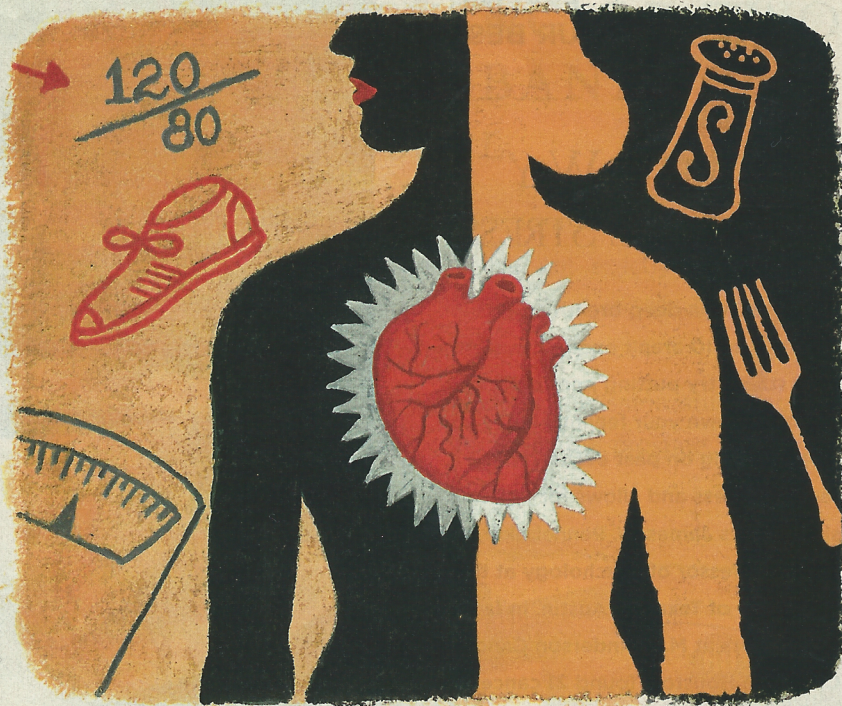


Even if your doctor gave you a clean bill of health at your last checkup, you may want to check in again. On the basis of accumulated research, doctors are rethinking heart-health indicators, such as blood pressure and cholesterol readings, and in the case of the former, they've devised a new standard for what's healthy and what's not.

Blood Pressure Drop Adults with a blood pressure reading of 120/80—a reading long considered to be within the limits of “normal”—could stand a chance of developing heart disease,



News That'll Do Your Heart Good

according to a review of more than 30 studies. The new standard now classifies 120/80 as prehypertensive, a condition that can lead to stroke, heart attack and kidney failure. “Now 120/80 serves as a wake-up call for people to start making lifestyle changes,” says Sheldon G. Sheps, M.D., who served on the National Institutes of Health committee that drafted the new guidelines.

What you should do: If your blood pressure is 120/80 or higher, get tested every year (get tested once every two years if your blood pressure is less

than 120/80). For an accurate reading, sit (don't lie down; doing so can skew the reading by causing blood pressure to drop) and don't talk (talking can trigger a rise in blood pressure), says Dr. Sheps. And being anxious about being in a doctor's office may cause blood pressure to spike, so if you're feeling nervous, ask your physician to do the reading at the end of the visit when you're calmer.

Triglycerides Recount The current recommendation for a fasting triglyceride level, a measurement that is part of a cholesterol blood test, is less than 150 mg/dL. But University of Maryland researchers recently found that levels of this type of fat in the blood spike throughout the day—sometimes even doubling. As a result, the researchers believe 100 is a safer target. “If your fasting triglyceride level is 150, it could soar to 300 during the day, putting you at a higher risk of heart disease,”

says Michael Miller, M.D., study co-author and director of preventive cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center.

The National Cholesterol Education Program, which reviews suggested cholesterol levels, says more research is needed before they will consider enacting this change.

What you should do: Current recommendations for an accurate triglyceride reading suggest abstaining from alcohol one to three days and food 12 to 14 hours before a cholesterol test. If your triglyceride levels are 150 or below, you should get checked at least once every five years. If your levels are higher, your doctor may recommend you get tested as often as once a year. It's especially important for women to pay attention to their triglyceride levels, which are a better predictor of heart attack in women than in men, says Dr. Miller.

—Rachel Grumman

BLOOD PRESSURE

Old Normal: 120/80 to 139/89

New Normal: less than 120/80

Prehypertensive: 120/80 to 139/89

Hypertensive: more than 140/90

TRIGLYCERIDES

Current Target: 150 or lower

Suggested Target: 100 or lower

lhj.com For more health news, visit:
www.lhj.com/health

JAMES STEINBERG