

Keeping your own ongoing record of **blood pressure, heart rate, and weight**—your VITALS—provides an invaluable longitudinal perspective on your health. Having these records with me in my MEDICAL NOTEBOOK has contributed to saving my life a few times when physicians have needed quick information. The following vitals guidelines are general goals. *Set your goals with your doctor.*

VITALS GOALS

BLOOD PRESSURE

Top (systolic): 100 - 120

Bottom (diastolic): 60 - 80 (< 90 ok for transplant grads)

Normal: 120/80

HEART RATE

Goal for most people: 60 - 70 beats-a-minute at rest

Normal for transplant patients: 90 - 100 beats all the time

WEIGHT

Set this goal with your doctor.

Heart transplant patients: Because we receive a new heart that is “denervated,” without its gazillion tiny nerves attached, a **heart rate** of 90 to 100 beats-a-minute is considered our “normal” whether we are running or resting. After five years, our **diastolic** blood pressure rises; below 90 is considered good/normal.

How to set up the VITALS section of your MEDICAL NOTEBOOK

Behind a tabbed divider labeled VITALS, insert several hole-punched, double-sided copies of the VITALS LOG on page 3. Facing those pages, on the backside of the tabbed divider, I paste my goals to help me interpret the results of each blood test.

How often should you record your vitals?

Ask your physician for guidance. During tough periods, you will need to be more attentive and take measurements more frequently. During stable periods, you might take your vitals once a week or once a month.

How long to keep these records?

I only keep 3 to 4 pages of logs in my MEDICAL NOTEBOOK. Every year or so, I decide to file old logs or toss them. When I graduated from heart failure to a heart transplant, for example, I tossed all logs for the years of heart failure—a magnificent moment. If blood pressure is bedeviling, I might keep those old logs in a file at home for awhile. I toss them when I stabilize

Please continue to page 2 for more suggestions about tracking your VITALS.

How to record your vitals

- **Date:** Include month/date/year.
- **Time:** Note AM or PM; it may matter.
- **BP-HR:** Blood Pressure and Heart Rate are listed in this order: systolic/diastolic-heart rate. Example: 120/80-70.
- **WT:** Weight changes may be symptomatic of more than holiday feasting or the flu. Sudden weight gain or loss is important to report.

Your daily NOTES/OBSERVATIONS matter

Every day you bring a different body to your cardiovascular condition. Note those differences in your VITALS LOG. At right are a few days of entries from my heart failure period, when making a pot of soup or doing a load of laundry was a huge achievement.

Medication changes, mood swings, fatigue, breathlessness, anxiety, depression, activity—all are important details to record. With good notes, you can give an accurate summary to your clinical team when they ask, “How are you?”

Other vital information to record, perhaps in its own column

Before my heart transplant, my VITALS LOG included a column labeled REST in which I noted the length of my afternoon naps. My increasing fatigue was yet another indicator of accelerating heart failure. Consider adding an extra column to your log for a vital symptom that you and your medical team are monitoring carefully; for example, angina or arrhythmia episodes. A quick skim of that column can be very informative, particularly in an emergency.

Sample Entries: NOTES/OBSERVATIONS
Slightly winded on stairs; made soup; laundry
15 min yoga early am; better on stairs; shop w/Jack
Woke sweating; thought box went off in middle of nite. Took BP every few minutes. Concl: nightmare.
Dinner,theater,overnight in Portland +30 min. walk!
Decent energy; still slightly winded
Walked 40 min on treadmill, 1.7 mph. Tired for dinner w/friends, strained, pale. Will back off...
Woke w/anxiety, slight breathing difficulty. Laid low, 20 min walk, 1.5 mph
Increased Toprol to 25 mg from 12.5
Normal, good day. Quietly grocery shopped.
Morning at rehab cut short bec. tired
Quiet, normal day. Walked 20 min, 1.5 mph
Woke w/slight but unmistakable crackly breathing: fluid in lungs? Stayed awake 1-2 hrs...My weight up; feel bloated, sluggish.

Please continue to page 3 for your VITALS LOG.

