


# Understanding My Vital Signs


 **Blood Pressure**<sup>1</sup> Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of arteries. Blood pressure rises and falls during the day. When blood pressure stays elevated over time, it is called high blood pressure. The medical term for high blood pressure is hypertension.

High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes the heart work too hard and contributes to atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). It increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, which are the first- and third-leading causes of death among Americans. High blood pressure also can result in other conditions, such as congestive heart failure, kidney disease, and blindness.

You can take steps to prevent high blood pressure by adopting a healthy lifestyle.


For instance:

- maintain a healthy weight
- be physically active
- follow a healthy eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods
- choose and prepare foods with less salt and sodium
- if you drink alcoholic beverages, drink in moderation


 **Weight**<sup>2</sup> As you age, you may notice changes in your body's makeup. You may lose muscle mass, which may increase frailty. You may also burn fewer calories, especially if you are not very physically active. Being overweight or obese is a concern as extra weight may increase your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and bone issues.

To maintain strength and a healthy weight, you should:

- choose foods that are high in nutrients, since you may need to eat fewer calories than you did when you were younger
- be physically active

 **Oxygen Levels**<sup>3</sup> Every tissue and every cell in the body needs a constant supply of oxygen to work properly. Oxygen gets into our cells and tissues via the lungs. The lungs breathe in oxygen from the air, then pass the oxygen into the bloodstream through millions of tiny air sacs.

Oxygen levels that are too high or too low can be damaging to the cells of your body.

 **Pulse**<sup>4</sup> Your heart rate, or pulse, is the number of times your heart beats per minute. Normal heart rate varies from person to person. Knowing yours can be an important heart-health gauge. As you age, the rate and regularity of your pulse can change and may signify a heart condition or other condition that needs to be addressed.

<sup>1</sup> Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. National Institutes of Health.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Weight-control Information Network

<sup>3</sup> Source: University of California San Francisco Medical Center

<sup>4</sup> Source: American Heart Association



# TIPS Sheet

## Better health at *your* fingerTIPS

### My Vital Signs

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

➔ My **blood pressure** is: \_\_\_\_\_

➔ My **weight** is: \_\_\_\_\_

➔ My **oxygen** level is: \_\_\_\_\_

➔ My **pulse** is: \_\_\_\_\_

Referrals/Action to take: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

For more information about TIPS, or resources available to you through the Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services, call **(914) 813-6408** or visit **[www.westchestergov.com/seniors](http://www.westchestergov.com/seniors)**.



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