

We've become obsessed with health stats: hours of REM sleep, step count, hydration levels. But experts say those numbers don't move the needle when it comes to big-picture wellness. Here's what does. **by JULIA SAVACOO**

A **T ANY GIVEN MOMENT,** you can tap into a wealth of information about yourself. Trackers, WiFi scales, smart clothing, and other gadgets continue finding new figures to dump on you—without necessarily explaining what to do with them. Simply put: We're drowning in health data, and we can't stop asking for more. Experts warn that the constant chirping of devices can lead to a fixation that's often more about ego than understanding your body. And all that nitty-gritty won't necessarily give you an edge, either. To live a longer, healthier life requires knowing the statistics that actually matter. Here are the nine numbers to keep an eye on—and how frequently (daily, monthly, or yearly) to check in on each.

01

WHAT IT IS Simply, the time between lights out and your morning alarm.

WHY IT'S KEY A lot of trackers give you particulars on your time in bed, like how often you wake during the night or the amount of REM sleep you get. But that information tends to be both imprecise and unnecessarily specific. Checking the raw hours is enough. [Plus, the way to get more REM time is merely to sleep more.] Research finds that those who get enough rest are fitter and weigh less than their sleep-deprived counterparts. And adequate hours may help fend off anxiety and depression, according to a study in *Lancet Psychiatry*.

AIM FOR Seven to nine hours a night.

02

WHAT IT MEASURES The number of heartbeats per minute.

WHY IT'S KEY It reflects the health and efficiency of your circulatory system. "Lower beats per minute indicate your heart is pumping more blood per beat, so it needs fewer bpm to circulate blood and oxygen," says Myles Spar, an integrative physician and NBA adviser. A study in the *British Medical Journal* finds that a resting heart rate of 90 to 100 bpm tripled the risk of death compared with a lower rate. Use a tracker, or do it the old-fashioned way, counting your pulse on your wrist for 15 seconds and multiplying by four.

AIM FOR 60 bpm (or in the 50s for athletes).

03

WHAT IT MEASURES The variation in time between heartbeats.

WHY IT'S KEY It's a good measure of stress. Typically, those who are relaxed and fit have a high HRV, while those who are stressed or depressed have a low one. [Meditation and yoga can help.] It's a feature on some trackers and heart-rate monitors.

AIM FOR It's personal. "It's best not to compare your HRV with others," Spar says. Instead, follow your HRV and track with your daily activities to learn what helps it. An elite athlete's is around 60 milliseconds; anything above 50 is considered good.

04

WHAT IT MEASURES The maximum rate at which your body can utilize oxygen.

WHY IT'S KEY Use it to test aerobic and cardiovascular capacity. "The more you train, the better you get at using oxygen to work your muscles maximally," Spar says. Basically, a higher number means you can go harder, longer. But it's not just a fitness tool: Poor VO2 max is correlated with diabetes, depression, and even earlier death. Get a reading at a performance lab, or use a wearable device while exercising.

AIM FOR 50 to 60 milliliters of oxygen per kilogram of body weight per minute of consumption [mL/kg/min].

05

WHAT IT MEASURES It's an estimate of internal fat. **WHY IT'S KEY** A spare tire on a guy isn't just unflattering—it's also dangerous. Too big a waist size means you're probably carrying around visceral fat, the kind that surrounds internal organs. Visceral fat produces toxic chemicals called cytokines, which inhibit cell sensitivity, impacting cholesterol, insulin resistance, and blood clotting. Cytokines also increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. To get an accurate figure, wrap a measuring tape just above your hip bone and exhale.

AIM FOR A waist circumference that's less than half your height. So if you're six feet tall, or 72 inches, make sure yours is 36 inches or less.

06

WHAT IT MEASURES How much fat is in your body.

WHY IT'S KEY It's a more accurate replacement for body mass index. The knock on BMI is that it doesn't differentiate between fat and muscle. For instance, if you're on a fitness kick, your scale reading may stay the same (or go up) even though you're losing fat and gaining muscle. More muscle mass corresponds with a faster metabolism, healthier bones, and better cardiovascular health. One shortcoming: Body-fat percentage doesn't distinguish between subcutaneous (or "surface") fat and visceral fat, so it's useful to think about this and waist size together. Find yours using a smart scale.

AIM FOR 6 to 17 percent.

07

WHAT IT MEASURES The pressure exerted on artery walls when your heart contracts [called systolic pressure, the top number] and the pressure when your heart relaxes [or diastolic, the bottom figure].

WHY IT'S KEY High systolic pressure is one of the most direct determinants of cardiovascular disease, according to the American Heart Association. High blood pressure can damage blood vessels throughout your body, harming your brain, kidneys, extremities, and more. Exercise, weight loss, limiting sodium intake, eating potassium-rich foods like sweet potatoes and edamame, and cutting back on booze can help.

AIM FOR 120/80 or lower.

08

WHAT IT MEASURES The levels of a waxy substance in the blood that comes in two forms—HDL, which is good, and LDL, which is bad—as well as triglycerides, a fat.

WHY IT'S KEY It's a predictor of heart disease. Maintaining a healthy weight, along with a high-fiber, low-sugar diet, can help keep you in the clear, says Dawn Jackson Blatner, a registered dietitian and consultant for the Chicago Cubs. High cholesterol is hereditary, so if it runs in your family, you and your doctor should keep an eye on it.

AIM FOR At least 60 milligrams/deciliter HDL; no more than 100mg/dL LDL; under 150mg/dL triglycerides.

09

WHAT IT MEASURES The amount of glucose coursing through your bloodstream.

WHY IT'S KEY It reveals your risk for diabetes, heart attack, and stroke. Glucose, your body's main source of fuel, is regulated by the hormone insulin. When blood sugar levels are too high, your body stores the excess glucose as fat, which causes weight gain. To get it under control, back off on processed food, simple carbs such as white bread and pasta, and sugar, Blatner says. Exercise also helps. And research shows consuming cinnamon may regulate blood sugar levels, too.

AIM FOR 70–99 milligrams per deciliter; 100–125mg/dL is prediabetic.