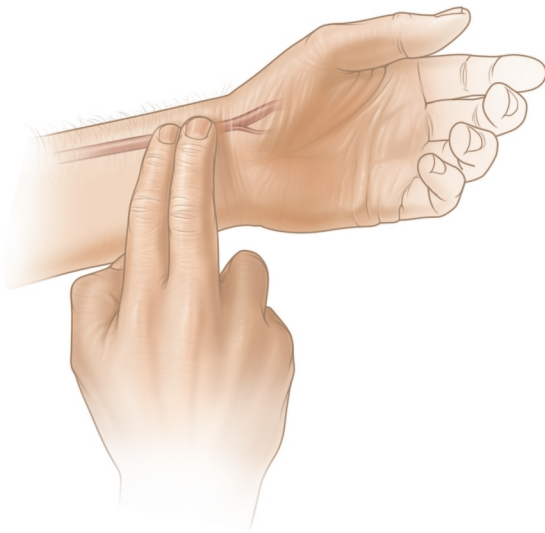


Your Health: How to Measure Your Pulse



Checking your pulse is a simple way to get information about your health. You can easily learn to measure your own pulse.

Checking your pulse can tell you:

- How fast your heart is beating. This is measured in beats per minute (bpm).
- The rhythm of your heartbeat.
- The strength of your heartbeat.

An uneven rhythm or a weak pulse may be a sign of a problem.

Why measure your pulse?

Measuring your pulse:

- Gives clues about how well your heart is working, and if it is healthy.
- Is used to check your health and fitness level.
- Can tell you if you are exercising too hard or not hard enough.

- Tells how well your heart is working and how your body is responding during an emergency.
- Can help your doctor find the cause of symptoms such as an uneven or rapid heartbeat (palpitations), dizziness, fainting, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- Is used to check the circulation in an arm or leg that is injured or has a blocked blood vessel.
- Is used to monitor medical conditions or the use of medicines that slow your heart rate. If you are taking medicines such as digoxin or beta-blockers (like atenolol or propranolol), your doctor may want you to check your pulse rate from time to time.

How to prepare

All you need to measure your pulse rate is a watch with a second hand or a digital stop watch.

Electronic pulse meters (heart rate monitors) measure how fast your heart is beating automatically. They send a signal from your finger, wrist, or chest. They are useful if you have trouble measuring your pulse or if you want to check your pulse during exercise without stopping.

How to measure your pulse

As your heart beats and forces blood through your body, you can feel a throbbing (your pulse) at any point where an artery comes close to the surface of your skin. You can measure your pulse at any of these points. Examples include the wrist, neck, temple area, groin, behind the knee, or top of the foot. Most people use the wrist or neck.

You can measure your pulse rate by counting the beats for a set period of time.

- Place your index and middle finger on the underside of your opposite wrist, below the base of the thumb. Another place to measure your pulse is just to the side of your Adam's apple, in the soft area at the side of your neck. Check one side at a time.
- With the flat part of your fingers (but not the tips), press firmly. Do not push so hard that you cannot feel the pulse. If you are taking someone else's pulse, do not use your thumb. If you do, you will feel your own pulse along with the other person's.
- Count the number of beats for 30 seconds; then multiply that number by 2 to get the beats per minute. If you are taking your pulse during exercise, you may count the beats for only 10 seconds and multiply by 6.

Results

Resting heart rate

Checking your pulse after you have rested for 10 minutes or more is a good way to check the health of your heart and circulatory system. The best way to get your resting pulse rate is to take your pulse first thing in the morning. Measure it just as you wake up, before you get out of bed.

Many things affect normal heart rate, including your age, activity level, and the time of day. The chart that follows shows the normal range of a resting heart rate (pulse rate after resting 10 minutes) in beats per minute, according to age.

In general, the lower your resting heart rate, the more efficient your heart is and the healthier you are.

Resting heart rate

Age	Beats per minute (bpm)
Babies to age 1:	100–160
Children ages 1 to 10:	60–140
Children age 10+ and adults:	60–100

Checking your pulse during exercise

A good way to tell if you are working out too hard or not hard enough is to check your pulse during physical activity. Talk to your doctor about what your lowest and highest pulse rate should be during exercise. The best range for you is called your target heart rate. Your target heart rate depends on your age, resting pulse, and activity level.

Uneven heart rhythm

Your pulse usually has a steady, regular rhythm. A pause or extra beat now and then is normal. Talk to your doctor if you notice frequent skipped or extra beats. This can be a sign of a heart problem that may need treatment, such as atrial fibrillation.