

## Heart screenings save lives

During [American Heart Month](#), here's a checklist to make - the who, what, where, when, how and why of heart screenings.

Matt Janus, a wellbeing coordinator for [OSF HealthCare](#), outlines the screenings you need to know.

- When you visit your health care provider, they should strap a cuff on your arm and check your blood pressure, or the amount of pressure your blood is putting on the walls of your arteries.

Blood pressure is measured using two numbers on top of each other. Systolic blood pressure, the top number, measures the pressure in your arteries when your heart beats. Diastolic blood pressure, the bottom number, measures pressure between beats. A normal blood pressure is less than 120/80.

"There's a reason people call blood pressure the silent killer. Sometimes you can have really high blood pressure and not feel it," Janus says. "Consequences of uncontrolled blood pressure include stroke, heart attack or heart failure."

Janus suggests not to rely on the blood pressure stations at big box store pharmacies. Those can skew results. Get it checked at a provider's office instead.

- Janus says poor [cholesterol levels](#) are a risk factor for coronary artery disease. He says a provider should perform a lipid panel, or a blood draw from the inside of your elbow. The provider can then measure cholesterol levels from the blood. This should happen at your yearly physical or twice a year if your health dictates it.

So-called "bad cholesterol" is low-density lipoprotein (LDL). "Good cholesterol" is high-density lipoprotein (HDL). And triglycerides are another metric providers look at. LDL values should be less than 100 milligrams per deciliter. HDL should be greater than 60 milligrams per deciliter. And triglycerides should be less than 150 milligrams per deciliter.

- A [cardiac calcium screening](#) is possible for people with a high risk for heart issues.

"That's a type of imaging where providers can look at how much calcium is in your coronary arteries. That can be a marker of your risk for coronary artery disease down the line," Janus explains.

Know your [risk factors](#), Janus says. Some are out of your control: age, race and family history. Others you can control: eating healthy and exercising to maintain a healthy weight, avoiding alcohol and smoking, and controlling your blood sugar if you have diabetes. Your provider may have you get heart screenings more often depending on your risk factors.

"A lot of time in [cardiac rehab](#), we see folks who have not been to a doctor in several years. They had no idea they had an issue," Janus says. "Going to those regular checkups and making sure everything is in good shape is a good idea."

Learn more about heart care on the [OSF HealthCare website](#). Call your primary care provider to see what heart screenings and risk factors apply to you.