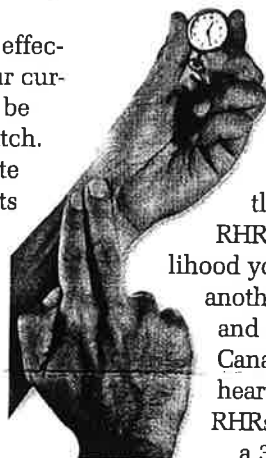


# Feel the Beat: What Your Resting Heart Rate Says About Your Health

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One of the easiest and most effective means to measure your current and future health can be done with two fingers and a watch. Measuring your resting heart rate (RHR)—the number of heartbeats per minute while at rest—can be a strong marker for potential heart problems.

"A high RHR is a sign of poor muscular heart function," says Tamara Horwich, MD, of UCLA's Division of Cardiology. "The more beats your heart has to take eventually takes a toll on its overall function."



*Your resting heart rate is an easy way to measure possible heart problems.*

likely to suffer a coronary event than those with a lower RHR (62 beats per minute).

If you currently battle heart disease, your RHR can predict the likelihood you may die from it or another health issue. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada recently found that heart disease patients with RHRs higher than 78 had a 39 percent greater risk of suffering a major vascular event, a 77 percent increased risk of cardiovascular disease death, and a 65 percent increased chance of death from some other cause.

## RHR: What is high? What is low?

A RHR between 60 and 100 beats per minute is considered normal, and recent research has found that RHRs at the top of this range or beyond can increase your risk for cardiovascular disease and shorten your lifespan.

A study in *The BMJ* tracked cardiovascular health of about 3,000 men and discovered a high RHR was linked with lower physical fitness, and higher blood pressure, body weight, and levels of circulating blood fats. The results also showed that the higher a person's RHR, the greater the risk of death. A RHR between 81 and 90 doubled the chance of premature death, while a RHR higher than 90 tripled it. On the basis of their findings, the researchers calculated that every 10 to 22 additional beats per minute in RHR increased the risk of death by 16 percent.

Women are not immune from a high RHR either. Another study in *The BMJ* found that women age 50 to 64 with the highest RHR (more than 76 beats per minute) were significantly more

## What can you do?

Anything that improves heart health can also help to lower and control your RHR. Here are some suggestions:

- **Do More Aerobic Exercise.** This is standard advice to improve overall health, but in terms of RHR, regular activity has a direct correlation with a low RHR, says Dr. Horwich. "Studies have shown that people who are physically active tend to have low RHRs," she says. "When you are not fit, your heart is less efficient at pumping blood and nutrients around your body." When it comes to lowering RHR, though,

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

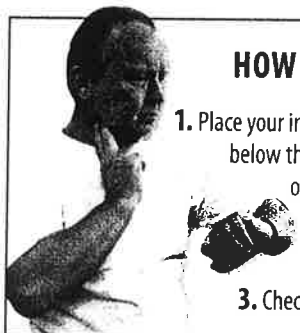
*Steps to ensure an accurate RHR reading:*

- Do not take within one to two hours after exercise or a stressful event. Your heart rate can stay elevated after strenuous activities.
- Wait an hour after consuming caffeine, which can cause heart palpitations and make your heart rate rise.
- Standing after a long period of sitting can elevate your heart rate.
- Certain medications, such as anti-depressants and some blood pressure medicines, can slow or speed up your RHR.

intensity matters. One study that focused on 55-year-old men and women found one hour per week of high-intensity aerobic training (66 percent of one's maximum effort) lowered RHR more efficiently than low intensity (33 percent of maximum effort).

- **Check Your Cholesterol Levels.** High cholesterol restricts blood flow through the arteries and causes wear and tear on blood vessels. These problems can make your heart beat faster than normal to move around blood.
- **Reduce Your Stress With Yoga.** People under stress or with severe anxiety have high RHRs, and doing yoga may help. People who adopted a regular yoga practice were able to lower their heart rates by 19 to 22 beats per minute when they applied yoga techniques like quieting the mind through meditation and mental imagery and regulating their breathing, according to a 2013 study. "Checking your resting heart rate can be a simple way to monitor your overall health," says Dr. Horwich. "If you find your heart rate is consistently running high, it may be time to visit your doctor for a checkup."

## HOW TO MEASURE YOUR RHR



1. Place your index and middle finger on your wrist just below the thumb, or on your neck to either side of your throat, so you can feel your pulse.
2. Count the number of beats for 30 seconds and double it to get your beats per minute.
3. Check it several times to get an exact number.