



## Travel with Your Health in Mind

Visiting other countries is exciting. Don't let getting sick ruin it. Check if you need vaccinations prior to your trip.

### Research in Advance

Visiting foreign countries may come with a risk of illness if you're not prepared. Risk may vary based on places you're visiting, planned activities, your current health and vaccination history. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Traveler's Health Tool on [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov) lists recommended vaccines for your destination and provides pre-travel advice.

### Talk with Your Doctor

If vaccines are necessary for your trip, visit your primary care provider (PCP) at least four to six weeks before you leave. Some vaccines require multiple doses and need time to take full effect. If your PCP's office doesn't carry the vaccines you need, you can go to a travel clinic or your local health department. The most common travel vaccines, Hepatitis A and B are covered by Medical Mutual plans. Depending on your destination, you may also need medication to prevent malaria.

Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### Save Vaccine Records

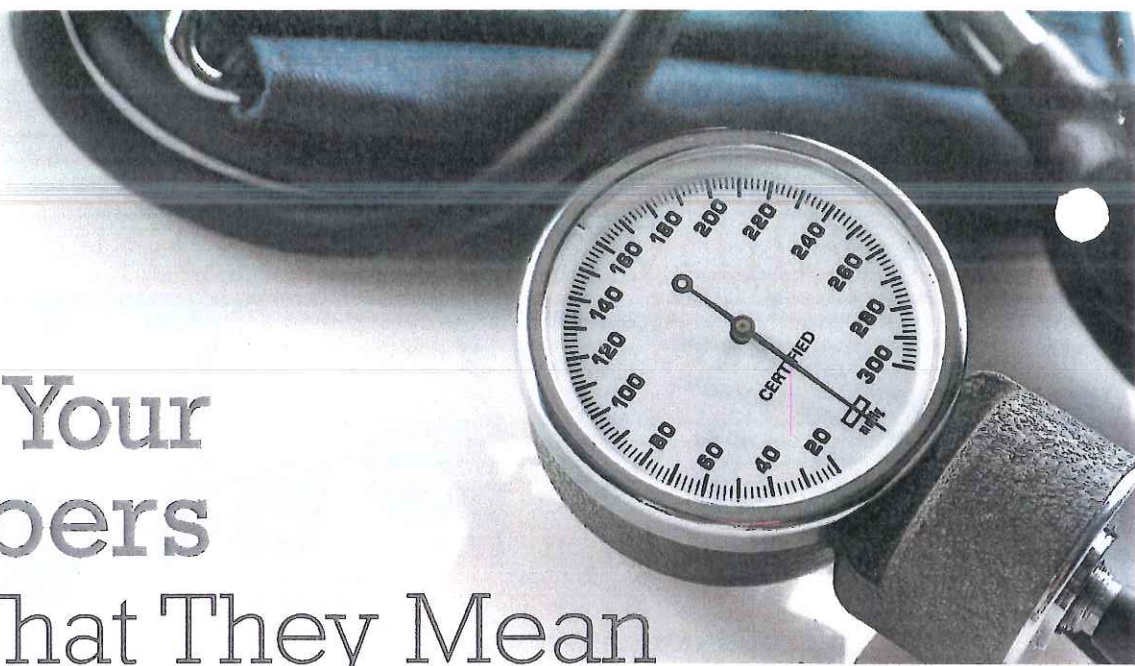
Vaccination records are maintained at your PCP's office only for a limited time. Keep records for any vaccines you get, especially if you travel often, because it's easy to forget which vaccines you've had. If you can't find the records you need, you may have to repeat vaccines, which is safe, but not ideal.

### Stay on the Safe Side

The last thing you want to worry about during vacation is getting sick. In addition to vaccines, stick to safe eating and drinking habits to reduce your risk of travelers' diarrhea and other diseases. Bottled water or canned drinks are the safest drinking options when traveling. Don't put ice in your drinks unless it's made from bottled, disinfected water. Avoid raw fruits and vegetables that may have been rinsed in tap water and also avoid raw meat.

For more vaccine information, visit  
[MedMutual.com/Vaccines](http://MedMutual.com/Vaccines).





# Know Your Numbers and What They Mean

To maintain a healthy heart, it's important to have regular blood pressure screenings. It's even more important to understand your results and know your risk for high blood pressure. The following Q&A provides helpful information to keep you and your heart healthy and strong.

High blood pressure (hypertension or HBP) is when the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels, is consistently too high. HBP greatly increases your risk for heart disease and stroke. Starting at age 18, you should have your blood pressure checked at least once every two years.

## Who's at risk for high blood pressure?

Nearly half of American adults have high blood pressure and may not know it. Risk factors for HBP include family history, race, diet, stress, tobacco use, alcohol consumption and lack of physical activity.

## What do the numbers of the blood pressure result mean?

Blood pressure results consist of two numbers measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg), a unit of pressure. The top number (systolic pressure) is pressure the heart uses to push blood through arteries. The bottom number (diastolic pressure) is the pressure as the heart is at rest between beats.

## What's considered high blood pressure?

Experts recently changed the definition of high blood pressure from 140/90mm Hg to 130/80mm Hg to allow for earlier intervention since complications can occur at lower numbers. Make sure the provider gives you your blood pressure results, because it's the only way to know if you have high blood pressure.

## If my numbers are high, does that mean I have high blood pressure?

Not necessarily. Your provider may request additional screenings since your blood pressure can vary due to emotions, such as stress, or consumption of salty foods and alcoholic beverages. Before a blood pressure screening, avoid coffee and exercise and also empty your bladder for most accurate results.

## How can I lower high blood pressure?

Making lifestyle changes, such as reducing the amount of salt in your diet and increasing physical activity, can lower and control your blood pressure. Talk to your primary care provider about creating a treatment plan that's right for you.

To learn more about healthy lifestyle changes to control your blood pressure, visit [MedMutual.com/Dash](http://MedMutual.com/Dash).



## What's the Deal with Probiotics?

Probiotic supplements are a hot health trend right now. Learn more about what probiotics are good for and why it's important to talk to your primary care provider (PCP) before using them.

Probiotics are over-the-counter supplements in pill, liquid or powder forms that contain strains of living bacteria similar to the healthy bacteria normally found in your body. They have become a popular dietary supplement and people use them for a variety of reasons—everything from immune system support to gut health.

Probiotics are often recommended for improving digestive health and treating the symptoms of digestive disorders. For example, probiotics may relieve uncomfortable symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, a condition characterized by diarrhea, constipation, bloating, and abdominal pain and cramping. They can also help return your digestive track to normal after being sick and even relieve symptoms of vaginal and urinary tract infections.

Before you take a probiotic supplement, talk to your PCP to determine what strains may be right for you. Heather Butscher, a Clinical Dietitian for University Hospitals Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio, stresses the importance of consulting your provider to learn which strain of probiotics to take. There are hundreds of probiotic strains, each of which can be used to treat different conditions.



Butscher explains,

*"Patients need to know the right probiotic strain to use if they want to notice a difference for a specific condition. The strain used to treat irritable bowel syndrome is not the same strain used to decrease symptoms associated with small bowel bacterial overgrowth."*

Probiotic microorganisms are also found naturally in foods. Butscher encourages adding fermented foods that contain probiotic strains, such as yogurt or sauerkraut, to your diet. It's an easy way to replace healthy bacteria without taking a supplement. If you're interested in learning more about naturally incorporating probiotics into your diet, visit [MedMutual.com/Probiotics](http://MedMutual.com/Probiotics).

## A Look Inside

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### Go Paperless

To receive future Healthy Outlooks electronically, log in to My Health Plan at [MedMutual.com/Outlooks](http://MedMutual.com/Outlooks).

- Under the My Profile tab, click Communication Preferences
- Under Health Resources, select email

### Schedule Your Appointment Today

If you haven't had a yearly preventive checkup this year, summer is a good time to check it off your list. Contact your primary care provider's office to schedule your appointment. Most Medical Mutual health plans cover a preventive checkup once per calendar year, at little or no out-of-pocket cost. To check your benefits, call the number on your ID card or visit [MedMutual.com/Member](http://MedMutual.com/Member).

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2060 East Ninth Street  
Cleveland, OH 44115-1355

