



What's a normal resting heart rate?

Answers from Edward R. Laskowski, M.D.

A normal resting heart rate for adults ranges from 60 to 100 beats a minute.

Generally, a lower heart rate at rest implies more efficient heart function and better cardiovascular fitness. For example, a well-trained athlete might have a normal resting heart rate closer to 40 beats a minute.

Keep in mind that many factors can influence heart rate, including:

Activity level

Fitness level

Air temperature

Body position (standing up or lying down, for example)

Emotions

Body size

Medications

Although there's a wide range of normal, an unusually high or low heart rate may indicate an underlying problem. Consult your doctor if your resting heart rate is consistently above 100 beats a minute (tachycardia) or if you're not a trained athlete and your resting heart rate is below 60 beats a minute (bradycardia) — especially if you have other signs or symptoms, such as fainting, dizziness or shortness of breath.

Determining Your Resting Heart Rate

In general, the higher your resting heart rate, the less physically fit you are, and the lower your heart rate, the more physically fit you are. (Some athletes have resting heart rates in the 40s.) One way to see if your new workout is succeeding is to check your resting heart rate over a few months. See if it has increased, decreased, or remained the same. If your workouts are effective, your resting heart rate will slowly decrease, or at least remain constant. Your body has many ways of telling you when enough is enough, and if your resting heart rate has increased, you should start listening to your body by decreasing your workout frequency or intensity.

Your resting heart rate is best measured when you first wake up in the morning, before your feet leave the sheets.

Grab a stopwatch, or a clock or watch with a second hand, then find your pulse. You can locate your pulse either in your radial artery on your wrist or at your carotid artery in your neck. Choose the spot that works best for you.

The only trick to measuring your heart rate is that you must use the correct fingers to do the measuring. Your thumb has a light pulse and can create some confusion when you are counting your beats. It's best to use your index finger and middle finger together.

After you find the beat, you need to count how many beats occur within 60 seconds. The shortcut to this method is to count the number of beats in 10 seconds, and then to multiply that number by 6. This method gives you a 60-second count.

Example: You count 7 beats in 10 seconds: $7 \times 6 = 42$ beats per minute.

If you have trouble finding your pulse or separating the beats in your body from the ticks of your watch, ask a friend for help. Have your friend count your pulse beats while you watch the clock or vice versa.