

Heart Smart: Lower Your Risk For Heart Disease

Heart disease is used to describe a range of diseases that affect your heart. The term “heart disease” is often used interchangeably with “cardiovascular disease”. Cardiovascular disease generally refers to conditions that involve narrowed or blocked blood vessels that can lead to a heart attack, chest pain or stroke.

Uncontrollable Risk Factors

- Age
- Gender
- Family History
- Race

Controllable Risk Factors

- Smoking
- Physical activity
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Being overweight or obese
- Diabetes

Know Your Numbers

Knowing your numbers can help you stay informed about your heart health and your risk of developing heart disease.

- **Blood Pressure:** high blood pressure makes the heart work harder and damages the blood vessels. Try to manage your blood pressure with healthy lifestyle habits to reduce your risk of stroke.
 - *Normal blood pressure:* 120/80 mm Hg or less
 - *Elevated blood pressure:* 129/80 mm Hg or less
 - *Hypertension (Stage 1):* 130-139/80-89 mm Hg
 - *Hypertension (Stage 2):* 140/90 mm Hg or greater
- **Cholesterol:** When cholesterol levels are too high, you have an increased risk of heart disease, heart attack and stroke. LDL (“bad”) cholesterol causes a build-up of plaque in the arteries that can block the flow of blood to and from the heart. HDL (“good”) cholesterol can help lower LDL cholesterol and protect the heart. Triglycerides are fats that are found in the blood from extra calories that our body did not need or use. High triglycerides can signal a higher risk for heart disease. See your doctor for regular check-ups to monitor your cholesterol levels.

- **Men Aged 20 or Older**
 - *Total Cholesterol*: 200 mg/dL or less
 - *Triglycerides*: 130 mg/dL or less
 - *LDL ("Bad")*: 100 mg/dL or less
 - *HDL ("Good")*: 40 mg/dL or higher
- **Women Aged 20 or Older**
 - *Total Cholesterol*: 200 mg/dL or less
 - *Triglycerides*: 130 mg/dL or less
 - *LDL ("Bad")*: 100 mg/dL or less
 - *HDL ("Good")*: 50 mg/dL or higher

Reduce Your Risk

While you cannot change your uncontrollable risk factors, there are still things you can do to improve your controllable risk factors for heart disease.

- **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** Even taking off a few pounds can provide cardiovascular benefits. Focus on eating a healthy diet and increasing physical activity to lose the extra weight.
- **Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet:** Eating a heart-healthy diet can reduce your risk for heart disease. Eat more fiber; it helps reduce cholesterol and manage weight. Fiber-rich foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans/legumes. Choose healthy fats from avocados, nuts, seeds, salmon, tuna and olive oil. Limit or avoid unhealthy fats (saturated and trans fats), from animal meats, dairy products, fried foods, processed foods and packaged baked goods. Salt (or sodium) can raise your blood pressure. Reduce your intake by flavoring foods with spices and herbs, buying fresh or frozen whole foods rather than canned, and limiting convenience foods.
- **Get Moving:** Regular physical activity can help control cholesterol and blood pressure and maintain a healthy weight. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity five days a week and /or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week for health benefits. Find an activity that you enjoy.
- **Stop Smoking:** Cigarette smokers have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Speak with your physician to understand what method of quitting may be the best for you to use. Find smoking cessation programs in your area or on the Internet. Many hospitals, public health departments, telephone hotlines and employers offer tobacco cessation programs that provide support from trained professionals to help you create healthy smoke-free habits.
- **Manage Stress:** Stress can have many health implications, especially for heart health. Creating new healthy habits can help you cope with stress. Some coping strategies include: engaging in regular physical activity, accepting things you cannot change, getting organized and getting enough sleep.

Resources

- American Heart Association: www.heart.org
- U.S. National Library of Medicine: www.medlineplus.gov/cholesterollevelswhatyouneedtoknow.html

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