

Heart Smart: How to 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
- Overweight/obesity
- Diabetes

Small Changes You Can Make to Reduce Your Risk

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 quit smoking programs in your area or on the Internet.

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 can't change, remembering to laugh, getting organized and getting enough sleep.

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