

# Heart Health Tips

## Heart Disease

You might not give it much thought throughout the day, but your heart is working around the clock for you. Your heart is the most important muscle in your body because it pumps blood and oxygen to all of your organs.

When your heart doesn't get the care it needs, serious problems can develop in the lining of the arteries, which then lead to plaque formation. Plaque is what leads to heart attacks and blockage of blood flow in the arteries. Understand the conditions that affect your heart and the habits that can help prevent or manage them. Taking action will help you keep your ticker in top shape.

## Cholesterol

### What is cholesterol?

Not all cholesterol is bad, your body needs some to work right.

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that:

- your body makes, and
- you also get from food

It :

- allows your body to make vitamin D and certain hormones, including estrogen in women and testosterone in men, and
- helps with digestion.

### Why should I care about cholesterol?

There are two types of cholesterol you may have heard about:

- High-density lipoprotein or HDL, often called **good cholesterol** and
- low-density lipoprotein or LDL, often called **bad cholesterol**

Bad cholesterol can contribute to artery-clogging plaque. Good cholesterol, on the other hand, helps remove plaque. In the end, it helps protect you from getting heart disease. Having too much of the bad, or not enough of the good, can lead to heart disease.

### How do I know if I have high cholesterol?

There are usually no symptoms of high cholesterol. That's why it's best to get your cholesterol levels checked through a blood test or home kits. You may need to go without eating, drinking, or taking medication, anywhere from nine to 12 fasting hours before your test. That blood test will give you several numbers, including your total cholesterol, your levels of good and bad cholesterol, and triglycerides, which is a type of fat.

### Cholesterol Goals

Total cholesterol : Less than 200 mg/dL

### LDL/Bad Cholesterol :

Less than 70 mg/dL (if you already have heart disease)

Less than 100 mg/dL (if you are at high risk for heart disease)

Less than 130 mg/dL (if you are at low risk for heart disease)

### HDL/Good Cholesterol

Greater than 40 mg/dL for men and  
greater than 50 mg/dL for women

Triglycerides : Less than 150 mg/dL

### **How often should I have my cholesterol levels checked?**

- If you are over the age of 20 and don't have heart disease, you should have your levels checked every 4 to 6 years.
- You may need to get your cholesterol checked more often if you're at risk for heart disease, have high cholesterol, or have been on medications that treat high cholesterol.

### **How can I lower my cholesterol levels?**

Medications and lifestyle changes can help you get high cholesterol under control. Even if you don't have high cholesterol, you can still make changes to your daily habits to lower your risk of heart disease.

#### **Here are steps you can take:**

**Eat healthy:** Your meals should be mostly fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, poultry, fish, and nuts while limiting red meat and sugary foods and drinks. Bonus: Eating a heart-healthy diet can help you lose weight, which may help lower your cholesterol.

**Move more:** Aim for 30 minutes of heart-pumping activity most days of the week. Think brisk walking, bicycling, and swimming.

**Quit smoking:** No matter how long you've been a smoker, you will still benefit from quitting.

**Avoid second-hand smoke:** Even if you don't smoke, being around it can raise your risk of heart disease.

## **High Blood Pressure**

### **What is high blood pressure?**

When you have high blood pressure, also called hypertension, the force of blood against the walls of your arteries is high.

Without treatment, high blood pressure can ;

- damage your arteries, heart, kidneys, and other organs
- lead to heart attacks, strokes, and kidney failure. It can also
- cause vision and memory loss, erectile dysfunction, fluid in the lungs, chest pain, circulatory problems, and several other conditions.

### **What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?**

You might have heard that high blood pressure is called a “silent killer.” That’s because there may be no symptoms. There are various groups of symptoms can be occurred according to time and severity and what organ is damaged, starting with headache and eye issues ending with stroke or heart attack.

### **How do I know if I have high blood pressure?**

A blood pressure test is the only way to know if your blood pressure is too high. During the test, a cuff is placed around your upper arm to measure the pressure of blood flowing through the arteries.

While it’s almost impossible to tell if you have high blood pressure without a test, there is something called hypertensive crisis where your blood pressure is so high that you need emergency care. In this case, you would have symptoms. If you have high blood pressure along with severe headaches or back pain, chest discomfort, nausea or vomiting, feeling nervous or anxious, visual problems, or seizure, call for help.

### **What do the numbers from a blood pressure test mean?**

There are two numbers in blood pressure readings. If one or both are too high, you could have high blood pressure.

Systolic pressure is the top number. It tells you the pressure of blood flow on your artery’s walls when your heart is beating and pushing blood to your body. It’s the higher of the two numbers.

Diastolic pressure is the bottom number. It tells you the pressure on your artery’s walls between heartbeats, when your heart is relaxing and refilling with blood.

Understanding Blood Pressure Readings is based on at least two readings:

Normal, less than 120/less than 80

At risk for high blood pressure, 120-129/less than 80

High blood pressure, 130/80 or higher

### **How often should I have my blood pressure checked?**

If you don’t have high blood pressure, you should have your pressure tested every two years after age 20. Your doctor will test it more often if you have or are at risk for high blood pressure.

### **How can I lower my blood pressure?**

In some cases, making lifestyle changes can lower your blood pressure. Talk to your doctor to find out if you need prescription medication as well.

**Whether you’re trying to prevent or treat high blood pressure, here are nine habits you should follow:**

**Eat healthy:** Fill your plate with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, beans, skinless poultry and lean meats, and fatty fish like salmon, trout, and herring. Limit saturated and trans fats, salt, and added sugar. It is recommended to limit salt to 2300 mg per day, and 1500 mg per day for those who

have high blood pressure or are at risk- African Americans, kidney disease and those on medication for hypertension.

**Get active:** If you have heart disease or any other health problem, talk with your doctor before you start exercising. If you're new to exercise or haven't exercised in a long time, start slowly, doing just a little bit at a time.

Eventually, you want to do aerobic exercise, like running, biking, swimming, or brisk walking, for 30 minutes most days of the week.

**Watch your weight:** If you're overweight, even just a small amount of weight loss (like losing 5% of your body weight) can improve your blood pressure.

**Manage stress:** Stress can raise your blood pressure, so find ways to unwind.

- Exercising and getting enough sleep can help relieve tension. Or
- try taking 15 minutes of quiet time every day to relax.
- Leaning on friends and family for support and
- doing things you enjoy can also help you cope.

**Avoid tobacco smoke:** If you smoke, quit. If you don't, second-hand smoke can still damage your heart, so avoid it as much as possible.

**Follow directions for prescription medications:** If your systolic pressure is 140 or higher or your diastolic pressure is 90 or higher, your doctor may prescribe medication. If so, make sure you take it exactly as directed.

**Limit your alcohol intake:** For women, this means no more than one drink a day. For men, it's no more than two. One drink equals 4 ounces of wine (about half a glass) or 12 ounces of beer (usually one can or bottle).

**Eat less salt (sodium) :** Most of the salt you get doesn't come from the salt shaker, but from processed foods. Cut back on packaged and prepared foods for more fresh meals made at home. Aim for less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day.

**Use care with medication:** Some prescription and over-the-counter medicines can have too much sodium or may raise your blood pressure. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about all of the medicines you are taking. Even things that you may consider "safe," such as anti-inflammatories or cold medication, may increase your blood pressure.

## Heart-Healthy Living

### What can I do in my daily life to lower my risk of heart disease?

- Even when you have several risk factors for heart disease, there are things you can do to improve your chances of avoiding it. You know you should eat healthy, exercise, and quit smoking. Here are some other steps you can take:
- Go for regular check-ups : At least once a year, get a physical to make sure you haven't developed any conditions that would put you at risk for heart disease, and to make sure you are controlling any conditions you already have.
- Keep tabs on your blood pressure and cholesterol: If you're getting regular check-ups, your doctor can help you track this, but you can also use a home blood pressure device or a blood pressure machine in a pharmacy. Your pharmacist can also check your blood pressure.

- Manage your diabetes: If you have diabetes, make sure you're closely watching your blood sugar levels, eating well, and exercising.
- Don't skip your medications: If you're taking medications for blood pressure, cholesterol, or diabetes, take them as directed. If you're having unpleasant side effects, don't stop taking them. Instead, ask about other options.

### **What tools can help me keep an eye on my heart health at home?**

If you're looking to keep close tabs on your blood pressure, weight, or amount of exercise, there are some tools that can help motivate you and track your progress. Here are a few you might consider:

**Blood pressure monitor:** This can help you track your blood pressure on your own. Look for an automatic, cuff-style, upper-arm monitor. Just make sure the cuff fits your arm before you buy it. Take your blood pressure twice in the morning and twice in the evening for at least 3 days to get an average reading.

**Heart rate monitor:** These devices tell you how hard your heart is working when you do physical activity.

While many people think these are just for athletes, they can help anyone track and improve their fitness level. It can also help you avoid overdoing it.

Talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program. Your doctor can also tell you what your target heart rate should be. To get the most benefit on the heart from the exercise you are doing.

**Pedometer:** One of the best ways to increase your activity level is to become aware of how much you move during the day, then challenge yourself to do more. A pedometer can help you do just that. For example, every 2 weeks, you might try to take 500 more steps a day. Aim for at least 10,000 steps a day.

**Activity tracker:** If you want something a little more high-tech than a pedometer, you might consider an activity tracker. There are dozens on the market, including some that you clip on your hip or wear as a wristband. Most track steps, distance, length of activity, and calorie burn. Some even go the extra mile and track your sleep, measure your heart rate, and act as a food diary.

Most sync with computers and smartphones and offer online dashboards. And some have forums and support groups online. Be careful, as they are not all 100% accurate, but they can certainly help guide you in your pursuit of getting healthy!

**Smartphone app:** Don't feel like investing in a pedometer or activity tracker? Then download an app onto your smartphone. There are dozens of apps that can help you count calories and track your steps, blood pressure, and weight. With some you can earn badges or points for reaching your activity goals or connect with friends for support.

**Scale:** People who weigh themselves just once a week tend to be more successful at taking off extra pounds, so investing in a scale could help you reach your weight loss goals.

Follow these tips: Weigh yourself on the same day, at the same time of day, on the same scale every week.

**Cholesterol home test kit:** These kits, which you can buy at a pharmacy or medical supply store, allow you to test your cholesterol between doctor visits. You can have the results in a matter of minutes instead of waiting days for results from your doctor. There are electronic and manual versions. If you plan to test your cholesterol often, consider an electronic kit, which will display and

store your readings.

## Eating for Your Heart

### How can I eat for better heart health?

You don't have to do a dramatic overhaul to your diet to see improvements to your weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol. Making small changes can be just as effective in lowering your risk of heart disease and may be easier to stick with for the long term.

You may want to :

- follow a formal diet so you know exactly what to eat, or you might
- prefer having some general guidelines to keep in mind.

Either way, a **heart-healthy diet should include these principles:**

Stay within a reasonable daily calorie limit. Your diet shouldn't cut out entire groups of foods or leave you hungry all the time. Pre-packaged meals (single portions of balanced, calorie-controlled meals) may be an option for you.

Use proper serving sizes. Consider getting a food scale so you can measure or weigh your food until you can learn to judge portions on your own. If you don't want to use a scale, you can find portion size guides online.

#### **Cut back on:**

Red meat.

Sugary foods and drinks. Try foods made with low- or no-calorie sweeteners, like sucralose, stevia, and aspartame instead of sugar.

Saturated and trans fats. Use healthier oils and sprays like olive or canola.

Sodium. Limit yourself to 2,300 milligrams (approximately one teaspoon a day) or less daily; 1,500 milligrams a day should be the max if you want to lower blood pressure. Talk to your doctor about whether you should use a salt substitute.

Processed foods or canned foods.

#### **Eat a variety of food that includes:**

Fruits and vegetables, especially those that are high in potassium, like bananas, raisins, and oranges (7-9 servings every day)

Whole grains (6-8 servings a day)

Low-fat dairy (2-3 servings a day)

Fish and lean meats prepared without skin or added fats (up to 6 ounces a day)

Get plenty of Fiber. A fibre-rich diet has been linked to a lower risk of heart disease and diabetes as well as lower blood pressure, lower bad cholesterol, lower blood sugar, and a healthy weight. Most adults need 20-30 grams a day. Great sources are **whole fruits** and **vegetables, whole grains,** and

**beans.** If you can't get enough from food, a fibre supplement might help. Check with your doctor about the type you should try.

### **Are there supplements that I can take to improve my heart health?**

Omega-3 fatty acid, which is found mainly in fish, may help lower blood pressure and triglycerides, lowering your risk of heart disease. It's best to get omega-3s from food, so you should aim to eat fatty fish, like salmon, mackerel, and trout, at least twice a week.

When you aren't getting enough omega-3s from food, a supplement may help. If you have heart disease or high triglycerides, talk to your doctor first. You may need larger doses or prescription-strength omega-3s.

Don't take more than 3 grams of omega-3 fatty acids per day unless your doctor tells you to. Taking too much can cause bleeding in some people. If you have a bleeding condition or take medicines that increase bleeding, such as blood thinners or pain relievers, talk to your doctor before taking omega-3s.

### **Should I take aspirin to help protect my heart?**

Aspirin helps thin the blood and prevents clots from forming. Taking a low-dose aspirin daily may help prevent a heart attack if you're at high risk for having one or you've had one in the past. Talk to your doctor about whether aspirin therapy is right for you.

You should not take aspirin if you:

- Have an allergy to aspirin
- Are having any medical or dental surgeries or procedures
- Are at risk of stomach or intestinal bleeding or a haemorrhagic stroke (caused by ruptured blood vessels)
- Drink alcohol regularly

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