



Tips for a Healthy Heart

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February is Heart Awareness Month. The human heart beats more than 2.5 million times in the average lifetime, pumping oxygen and nutrient rich blood to the entire body. In the United States cardiovascular disease (CVD), including coronary heart disease (CHD) continues to be the number one killer of both men and women.

Several factors contribute to CVD/CHD. Risk factors such as age (>45 for men and >55 for women) and family history can not be changed. However, the majority of risk factors including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, and being overweight can be decreased by making heart healthy changes. It is never too soon or too late to begin making these changes.

The following lifestyle modifications are recommended to decrease the risk of CVD:

- A healthy diet with fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy products and lean meats. Limit total fat intake to less than 30% of total daily calories; limit cholesterol to less than 300 mg per day. Sodium (salt) intake should be 2400mg per day, or about 1 teaspoon per day. Limit beverages and foods with added sugar. Alcoholic beverages should be limited to 2 per day for men and 1 drink per day for women.
- Weight control. Calorie intake should be balanced with physical activity. Body mass index (BMI) is calculated using height and weight. A healthy BMI ranges from 18.5 to 24.9. BMI of 25 or more and waist circumference more than 40 inches for men and 35 inches for women increases the risks of CVD and diabetes. More than half the United States population is overweight or obese. Even moderate weight loss can result in significant risk reduction. If you are overweight, a reasonable initial weight loss goal is 10% of your current weight.
- Stay active. The AHA recommends 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity at least 5 days per week. Examples of moderate aerobic activity include brisk walking (3.5 mph), cycling (5.5 mph), and dancing. Before beginning any new exercise routine, consult your physician.
- Blood pressure and lipid levels. Blood pressure consists of two numbers. In general, the top number (systolic pressure) should be <140 mm Hg and the bottom number (diastolic pressure) should be <90 mm Hg. In persons with other health issues including diabetes and chronic kidney disease, the blood pressure goal will be lower.

Lipid levels (or cholesterol) are the amount and types of fat in the blood stream. A lipid blood test measures total cholesterol and three major types of fat: triglycerides, high density lipoproteins--good or HDL, and low density lipoproteins—bad or LDL. High levels of triglycerides and LDL and low levels of HDL carry increased risk for CVD. The AHA recommends lipid screening at age 35 for men and 45 for women. Optimal lipid levels will vary with age, the presence of other cardiovascular risk factors and co-existing health issues. Your physician will be able to advise optimal lipid levels for you.

- Stop smoking.
- Know the signs and symptoms of heart attack. These may include pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the chest lasting more than a few minutes or re-occurring pain. Pain may be in one arm (typically the left) or both arms, neck, jaw, back or stomach. Other symptoms may include shortness of breath with or without exertion, nausea, cold sweat, or lightheadedness. If you develop these symptoms, you need to be checked out by a doctor quickly. Call 9-1-1 immediately.

For more information on prevention of cardiovascular disease visit the AHA at www.americanheart.org or the National Heart, Lung and Blood institute at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>.