

WELLNESSMONTHLY

American Heart Month | February 2019

Heart Disease Prevention Begins with Awareness

February is [American Heart Month](#), providing a chance to reflect on ways we can prevent heart disease, the leading cause of death in the U.S.

Manage Your Risk Factors

You can't change risk factors such as your age, gender, ethnicity or family history of early coronary heart disease. However, you can reduce your chance of having a stroke or heart attack by monitoring your health status and modifying certain habits. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Check blood pressure and cholesterol:** High blood pressure – referred to as “the silent killer” because it is often undetected – increases the heart’s workload, causing it to thicken and become stiffer. Cholesterol produces plaque that clogs arteries. Periodically check your blood pressure and get a blood test to gain valuable insights on your risk for heart disease.
2. **Eat well:** Certain foods affect blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and may cause inflammation. A heart-healthy eating pattern limits saturated fats, trans fats, added sugars, alcohol and sodium. U.S. dietary guidelines call for:
 - Vegetables from all subgroups
 - Fruits, especially whole fresh fruits
 - Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
 - Fat-free or low-fat dairy products and/or fortified soy beverages
 - Protein-rich foods such as fish, seafood, lean meats, eggs, legumes, nuts, seeds and soy products

Nutritionists recommend using monounsaturated fats, such as olive or canola oil. Other heart-healthy choices include polyunsaturated fats found in certain fish, avocados, nuts and seeds; leafy, green vegetables; whole grains; and berries.



National Wear Red Day®

Be relentless in support of women's health.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1

WEAR RED for awareness.

SHARE #WearRedDay on social media.



Feb. 1 is National Wear Red Day®. When you wear red on the first Friday in February, you are taking part in an annual campaign to raise awareness about cardiovascular disease prevention, especially for women.

3. **Lose weight, if needed:** Excess weight makes your heart work harder, raises blood pressure, blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and lowers HDL (“good”) cholesterol levels. It can also make diabetes more likely to develop. Consider these weight management tips:
 - Gradually phase in healthier foods and phase out less healthy foods.
 - Use a smaller dish to help control portions.

- Be active and drink plenty of water throughout the day.
 - Create a daily menu to stay on track and allow yourself an occasional treat.
4. **Get exercise:** No matter how well you eat, regular moderate-to-vigorous physical activity is still needed to burn calories and help prevent heart and blood vessel disease. At least 150 minutes (2½ hours) a week of activity that gets your heart pumping and leaves you a little breathless is recommended. Even short bursts of exercise and frequent walking can have lasting heart health benefits.
 5. **Manage stress:** Stress management techniques such as yoga, meditation, socializing with friends, playing sports or pursuing hobbies helps reduce anxiety and is good for your cardiovascular health.
 6. **Avoid smoking:** Cigarette smokers' risk of developing heart disease is two to four times that of non-smokers. Exposure to second-hand smoke increases the risk of heart disease for non-smokers.

Emotional Connection

It's not a coincidence that Valentine's Day occurs during American Heart Month. Emotional connections contribute to a sense of physical and mental well-being.

For example, studies show that hugging a person or a pet helps relieve stress and lowers blood pressure. Feelings of love are associated with the release of brain chemicals including oxytocin, which is known as the bonding hormone,

dopamine (happiness), cortisol (stress) and serotonin (mood). Caring for someone and feeling cared for has been shown to reduce cortisol and adrenaline levels.

Research also suggests that feelings of loneliness can suppress your immune system and lead to sickness. Loss of a loved one can cause a stress response with cardiac symptoms similar to a heart attack. People with strong social connections, long-term partners or spouses tend to live longer.

What Can You Do?

1. **Take care of yourself:** When was the last time someone who cares reminded you to go to the doctor, eat better or get some exercise? Your cardiovascular fitness and overall health is likely better if you followed his or her advice.
2. **Reach out:** If you feel depressed about your situation, ask a behavioral health professional, your personal medical provider or another trusted source for guidance.
3. **Don't disregard symptoms:** A heart attack occurs when an



artery is blocked by a blood clot or plaque that builds up over time. Common signs of a heart attack include squeezing pain in the chest, shortness of breath, pain that radiates up to the left shoulder and down the left arm, or a cold sweat. Other indicators include jaw pain, low-back pain, unexplained fatigue, nausea or anxiety.

Symptoms may also be triggered by a stressful event such as a death, divorce or romantic breakup. A condition called broken heart syndrome, or stress-induced cardiomyopathy, may cause chest pain, shortness of breath or an irregular heartbeat.

Depending on the condition, treatment may include changes in lifestyle, medication and behavioral health counseling.

Whether the cause of symptoms is physical or emotional, immediate medical care is needed to save lives.

Did You Know?

Research in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* links excess belly fat to higher blood pressure and unhealthy blood lipid levels. Eating fewer calories and exercising more can make a big difference.