

For A Healthy Heart

What makes for a healthy heart? Advice abounds, but the evidence consistently points to 10 important factors to keep the heart healthy.

1. Get active

Regular exercise helps to prevent heart disease by increasing the flow blood to the heart and strengthening the heart's ability to pumps more blood with less effort. Regular exercise also lowers your blood pressure and blood cholesterol. 30 minutes of moderate exercise every day is recommended.

2. Watch your weight
Having too many calories, fatty foods and being overweight is really bad for you. It puts extra stresses and strain on your heart and can trigger other conditions that lead to heart disease, makes you feel lethargic and de-energised and affects your self-image and confidence. Try eating more fruit and vegetables, less sugary foods, eat more unrefined carbohydrates such as seed breads, wholegrain cereals and pasta. So-called soluble fiber may also help reduce cholesterol so eat oats, beans and pulses such as kidney beans, peas and baked beans. Too much weight can put more strain on your heart

3. Eat healthy
Eat lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products as a source of magnesium, calcium and potassium. Eat fibre to control diabetes and hypertension. Also, eat seafood rich in omega-3 fatty acids. They to help clear clogged arteries and keep blood vessels strong and flexible.

4. Get screened regularly
It is important to get tested for certain risk factors that can lead to heart disease such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure, which can damage your cardiovascular system.

5. Control your blood pressure and blood sugar
High blood pressure makes the heart work overtime and it also tightens the walls of your arteries, which increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

6. Watch your salt intake
Monitor your sodium intake to prevent hypertension and deposits along the inner lining of the arteries. This can lead to coronary heart disease. A recommended level is 6g a day. Put less in cooking and try not to add any salt at the table.

7. Control your cholesterol
Stay away from foods that are high in saturated fats and trans fats because they can cause high LDL (bad) cholesterol, which caused plaque build-up in arteries, and can cause the narrowing of arteries, also known as atherosclerosis - and heart damage. A certain amount of fat is good for a well balanced diet but reduce the amount of fat and the type of fat you eat. Saturated fat affects blood cholesterol levels, so try to eat less full-fat dairy products, cakes, cookies, pastries and burgers and replace with monosaturated fats such as olive and rapeseed oil, nuts and avocado pears.

Polyunsaturated fats in small amount helps reduce cholesterol so oily fish (salmon, sardines) and oils like sunflower, corn and soya oil are good.

8. Watch your alcohol consumption
Excessive drinking leads to hypertension and many other health problems.

9. Don't smoke
The chemicals found in cigarettes can damage your heart and blood vessels, causing your arteries to become narrow. Smoking causes your heart to work harder because it constricts the blood vessels, and can ultimately lead to a heart attack.

10. Reduce your stress level
While the link between stress and heart disease is not completely clear, stress speeds up heart rate, and a heart attack is more likely to happen during times of stress. There is also a linkage between depression and heart disease.