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Heart Health

10 Minutes to a Healthier Heart

**Don't avoid exercising because you're short on time.
Even quick workouts can benefit your heart.**

Does spending an hour at the gym seem daunting – and something you really don't have time for? Fitness experts say you can work out 10 to 15 minutes at a time and still reduce your risk for heart disease.

The American Heart Association recommends all adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week.

What is moderate physical activity? It includes:

- » Brisk walking, jogging or running
- » Biking
- » Swimming
- » Dancing
- » Jumping rope

Now, let's tackle those 150 minutes – break it up! One-hundred fifty minutes each week breaks down to 30 minutes, five days a week. Want to break it up even more? Just make sure you are getting at least 10 minutes of aerobic activity at a time. Try 15-minute increments, twice a day, five days a week.

That means you could sneak in a 15-minute walk on your lunch hour and spend 15 minutes doing yard work in the evening. There's your daily exercise – and perhaps, a better-looking yard!

Be sure to check with your doctor before starting any type of exercise program.

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Women and Heart Disease

The facts about cardiovascular disease in women are worrisome. But there are plenty of things you can do to protect your heart health.

Many women live in fear of breast cancer, but they often don't realize that heart disease poses a much greater threat. In fact, heart disease is the number one cause of death among American women. Consider these sobering facts:

- » About one in 30 women die of breast cancer. But, nearly one in three women die of cardiovascular disease, which includes heart disease and stroke.
- » Cardiovascular disease kills more women each year than cancer, lung disease, Alzheimer's disease, and accidents combined.
- » About 24 percent of men who have a heart attack die within a year. In women, the figure is 42 percent.

Your chance of developing heart disease increases with age, and it goes up greatly after menopause. But women of all ages should be concerned about heart disease. It's never too early or too late to take steps to protect your heart.

Take charge of your heart health

You can't change some things that put your heart at risk, such as getting older and having a family history of heart disease.

There are also certain conditions that tend to be more common in women, such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, which are associated with an increased relative risk for heart disease. But there are plenty of other things you can do to keep your heart strong and healthy.

If you smoke, quit. Smoking has been closely linked to heart disease as well as a host of other diseases. Quitting is the single best thing you can do for your health. But quitting is hard. Talk to your doctor about products and support that can help you succeed.

Get your blood pressure checked. High blood pressure (hypertension) makes the heart work harder than normal. It can also damage your blood vessels. But you may have high blood pressure and not know it because it has no symptoms. Have your blood pressure checked on a regular basis, and if it is high, take steps to lower it. Exercise more, eat less salt, lose some weight if needed, and take medication if your doctor prescribes it.

Control your cholesterol. Cholesterol is a fatty substance that can clog your arteries and raise your risk of a heart attack.

Saturated fat raises your cholesterol level, so limit saturated fats and avoid trans fats. Instead, choose healthy mono- and polyunsaturated fats found in olive oil, nuts, seeds and some fish.

Get physical. Regular physical activity can cut your risk for many of the main causes of illness and death, including heart disease and stroke. It can also help you lower high blood pressure and cholesterol and control your weight. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity most days of the week. But check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.

Eat a heart-healthy diet. Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy. Choose lean meats, cut back on sugar, and watch your portion sizes.

Watch your weight. In most people, extra pounds leads to higher cholesterol and blood pressure levels. Keep your weight in check by combining a healthy, high-fiber diet with increased physical activity.

Know the signs of a heart attack

The keys to surviving a heart attack are knowing the signs and then acting quickly. Women often fail to recognize they are having a heart attack, and they are less likely than men to seek emergency treatment. That may be one reason why women are more likely than men to die from a heart attack. We all think we know what a heart attack looks like. We've seen the movies where the man grabs his chest or upper arm and collapses. Some heart attacks are sudden and dramatic. But most of them start slowly with only mild pain or discomfort. This can be confusing and cause a delay in treatment. Some of the signs of a heart attack include:

-)) Pain or discomfort in the center of the chest
-)) Pain or discomfort in other areas of the upper body, including the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach
-)) Shortness of breath with or without chest pain
-)) Other symptoms such as breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness

Chest pain or discomfort is the most common symptom in women. But they are more likely than men to have other symptoms, especially:

-)) Shortness of breath
-)) Breaking out in a cold sweat
-)) Nausea, vomiting or feeling of heartburn
-)) Back, left shoulder or jaw pain
-)) Severe fatigue or fatigue with exertion

Call 9-1-1 right away if you have symptoms of a heart attack. Call even if you're not sure it's a heart attack. Do not wait for someone to drive you to the hospital. Emergency medical personnel can start treatment right away if you need it. Minutes can make the difference between life and death with a heart attack.



Questions of the Heart

Remember to ask these vital questions about matters of the heart at your next doctor appointment.

How many times have you left the doctor's office and wished you could run back in with a question? At your next checkup, be prepared. Write down these key questions about heart health or keep them on the tip of your tongue.

What is my risk for heart disease?

Your habits and your personal and family health history can provide important clues to your doctor. In addition, talk to your doctor about your age, weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking habits and physical activity. Ask what you can do to lower your risk.

Do I have high blood pressure, and how can I control it?

High blood pressure, which often has no symptoms, can damage your arteries, heart and other organs.

What is my cholesterol level, and how can I keep it in normal range?

High levels of bad cholesterol (LDL, or low-density lipoprotein) can build up in the inner walls of arteries and can increase your risk of a heart attack or stroke. Diet, exercise and medications can all play a role in reducing your cholesterol.

How does my blood sugar level influence my risk?

High blood sugar levels may indicate diabetes, which may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

African Americans and Heart Disease

Heart disease is especially deadly among African Americans. Luckily, there are many ways to protect your heart.



Heat disease is the number one killer of men and women of all races in the United States. The main culprit is coronary heart disease, which occurs when fatty deposits build up in the heart arteries. This limits blood flow to the heart muscle, which can cause chest pain (angina). Coronary heart disease can lead to a heart attack.

Heart disease is especially deadly among African Americans. Compared to whites, African Americans:

- » Tend to get heart disease at a younger age
- » Have a higher rate of first-time heart attack at all ages
- » Are more likely to die of heart disease
- » Are more prone to sudden cardiac death

What puts a person at risk for heart disease?

Anything that makes it more likely that you'll get a disease is called a risk factor. Some risk factors can be controlled. Others can't. For example, two risk factors for heart disease that you can't control are:

- » Getting older
- » Having a family history of heart disease

Most of the other risk factors can be controlled. These include:

- » Smoking
- » High blood pressure
- » High cholesterol
- » Diabetes
- » Obesity
- » Not being physically active

Having any one of these risk factors increases the chance that you'll get heart disease. And these factors tend to go together, which raises the risk even more. For example, being overweight and not exercising makes you more likely to have high blood pressure. When you add those three factors together, you're at high risk for heart disease.

African Americans are at an increased risk for high blood pressure and diabetes. High blood pressure is especially dangerous because it doesn't cause symptoms, so you can have it and not know it. But all the while, it's damaging your heart arteries and setting the stage for heart disease.

What can I do to lower my risk for heart disease?

Your lifestyle choices have a direct impact on your health. Making some changes can help keep your heart healthy.

- » **Don't use tobacco.** Smoking is the single most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Quitting is the best thing you can do for your health.
- » **Lose some weight if you need to.** Losing as little as 10 or 20 pounds could make a big difference in your health.
- » **Eat a healthier diet.** Choose whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and lean meats. Eat fewer processed foods, which often have a lot of fat and salt. Ask your doctor about the DASH diet.
- » **Try to get 30 minutes of moderately intense aerobic physical activity a day.** Being active can lower your blood pressure, cut your risk for diabetes and help you control your weight. Check with your doctor before you increase your activity level. If you already have a disease that raises your risk of heart problems, lifestyle changes are still important, but they may not be enough. Work with your doctor to get the best care.
- » **Take your medicine just as prescribed.** It won't work if you skip doses or don't take it.
- » **Go to your follow-up visits.** Tell your doctor if you have any new symptoms, side effects from your medicine or changes in your health.
- » **Learn about your health.** Know what your blood pressure is and what it should be. Know your blood sugar and cholesterol numbers.