

Preventing Heart Disease: Ways to Lower Your Risk of Heart Disease

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How to manage your heart health is a subject many don't even put on their radar until something goes wrong. February is Heart Health Month—give your heart a little extra attention this month.

What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is the number one killer of women and men in the United States. It develops when the blood vessels supplying the heart become clogged with fatty deposits, or plaque. After the blood vessels narrow, blood flow to the heart is reduced. This can create a blood clot, blocking blood flow to the heart, resulting in a heart attack.



There are three major risk factors of heart disease: smoking, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. However; more recently, other risk factors have been identified, including diabetes, obesity, and physical inactivity. According to a Harvard Medical School Special Health Report, at least 8 in every 10 people who develop heart disease have one or more of the following risk factors:

- Lack of exercise (physical inactivity)
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol

Roughly 1 in 3 people in America will die of heart disease. Fortunately, there are many things you can do and steps you can take to protect your heart and lower your risk of developing heart disease.

What Can I do to Prevent Heart Disease?

Eat healthy: One of the biggest factors of heart health are the foods you choose to eat. Regularly eating heart healthy foods such as salmon, berries, broccoli, spinach and dark chocolate (yes, [dark chocolate!](#)) can help ward off heart disease. In addition, avoid consuming processed food, salt and alcohol in excess amounts. Talk to your doctor or a nutritionist to learn more about getting enough heart healthy foods in your diet.

Get regular exercise: Even in small amounts, exercise can reduce the risk of heart disease. Those who met the current minimum standards recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services (150 minutes per week) reduced their risk of heart disease by 14 percent and those who did more exercise (about 300 minutes a week) reduced their risk of heart disease by 20 percent, compared to people who did not exercise. It doesn't need to be complicated – most of your daily activities already contribute to your daily exercise, such as completing active chores around the house, yard work, or walking the dog. For better results try to include aerobic activities to get your heart rate up, such as brisk walking, running, swimming or bicycling.

See your doctor for regular checkups: The majority of adults who have heart disease don't know it. It's important to go in for your annual physical and know your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Early heart disease may not show any symptoms so regular visits to the doctor are crucial for early detection!

Keep your stress in check: Stress takes a huge toll on your heart health. Chronic stress can lead to high blood pressure, arterial damage, irregular heart rhythms and a weakened immune system. Recent research shows people under chronic stress are at higher risk for developing heart disease. Exercising, getting adequate sleep and eating right are great ways to manage stress. Sometimes your thoughts can contribute to the impact of distress on your well being. Seeking support through your EAP counseling benefit can help you remove barriers and create new habits to help you de-stress and get more out of life.

Try incorporating a new heart healthy food into each meal, take a yoga class, take steps when you can or try meditation. A few small changes now can make a big difference in the long run!

We Can Help

As part of your VITAL WorkLife EAP, you have access to a wealth of information on the [member website](#), including health and well being articles, healthy recipes, eLearning courses. In addition, your EAP offers unlimited telephonic counseling and access to brief face-to-face counseling. Contact us at **800.383.1908** to access your VITAL WorkLife EAP.

Sources:

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