

# SOLUTIONS FOR HEART DISEASE

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women. While there are some risk factors we can't control, others can be managed through lifestyle changes. Here are the facts you should know and what you can do to take charge of your heart disease risk.

## Heart Disease Facts

- About 655,000 people die from heart disease in the United States annually, accounting for 1 out of 4 deaths.
- Annually, 805,000 Americans experience a heart attack.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in both men and women.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for people of most ethnicities in the United States, including African Americans, Hispanics and Whites.
- For American Indians, Alaska Natives and Asians or Pacific Islanders, heart disease is second only to cancer as cause of death.
- High blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking are key risk factors for heart disease, and 47% of Americans have at least one of these three risk factors.

Source: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

## Heart Disease Risk Factors

- **Diabetes** Nearly 1 in 10 people in the United States has diabetes. Excess sugar in the blood can damage blood vessels and nerves that help control the heart muscle.
- **Being Overweight or Obese** More than 1 in 3 Americans, and nearly 1 in 5 children ages 2 to 19, are obese. Carrying extra weight puts extra stress on the heart.
- **Poor Diet** Only 1 in 10 adults are eating enough fruits and vegetables every day. Too much sodium can increase blood pressure levels and heart disease risk. A diet high in trans-fat, saturated fat or added sugar increases the risk for heart disease.
- **Physical Inactivity** Only 1 in 5 adults meets the physical activity guidelines of getting 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity. Staying active helps keep the heart and blood vessels healthy.
- **Excessive Alcohol Use** Drinking alcohol regularly can raise blood pressure levels and raise your risk of heart disease. If you do drink, do so in moderation, which is considered one drink a day for women and two for men. One drink is equivalent to 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof liquor.

## Preventing Heart Disease

- **Know Your Risk Factors.** Assess your current risk factors. If they can be modified or controlled, take steps to make changes to your lifestyle to reduce your risk.
- **Manage Stress.** Stress can elevate blood pressure and can also lead to unhealthy behaviors such as smoking or making poor food choices. Identify the main stressors in your life and find healthful ways to manage them. Try meditation, yoga, laughter, deep breathing, reading or exercise.
- **Get Moving.** Exercise is one of the best things you can do to lower your risk of heart disease. Find activities you enjoy, since you are more likely to stick with it if it's something you look forward to. Try enlisting a workout buddy to hold you accountable. Tracking your exercise can also be a fun way to stay motivated.

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- **Maintain a Healthy Body Weight.** Being overweight increases the risk of developing many diseases, including heart disease. Limit caloric intake and balance your intake with exercise.
- **Practice Portion Control.** Eating modest portions is necessary to control your weight. Portion control also limits the amount of saturated fat, trans fat and added sugar you consume, which are factors that aggravate heart health. Fill your plate at each of your meals like the MyPlate example for overall portion control and nutrient balance. Visit [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov) to learn more.
- **Eat more vegetables and fruits.** Vegetables and fruits contain antioxidants, phytochemicals, fiber and other plant compounds that prevent disease, including heart disease. Not only do they provide protective nutrients, but they also make you feel full, which helps you minimize the amount of unhealthy fats and sugar you consume. Enjoying a variety of fruits and vegetables of different colors will provide a variety of nutrients. Eat the rainbow every day!
- **Enjoy small portions of whole grains.** Whole grains are made with the whole grain and all its fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. Refined grains (like white bread, white rice, white pasta) are missing these nutrients. Enjoy whole grains like oats, brown or wild rice, and quinoa. Check food labels for at least 16 grams of whole grain and 3 grams of fiber per serving. Also check for "whole grain" as the first ingredient for breads, pastas, cereals, crackers and other grain foods.
- **Enjoy protein at each meal.** Protein preserves lean tissue (like heart muscle), helps with blood sugar control (which helps minimize heart damage), and plays a part in important functions like blood pressure control. Enjoy plant-based protein foods like beans, nuts, seeds, and soy products. Fish and seafood are excellent sources of protein and heart healthy fats. Cut down on the unhealthy saturated fats in animal foods by choosing lean meats and low-fat or nonfat dairy foods (milk, yogurt, cheese). Eggs are a great source of protein - use caution with the yolks, which contain some saturated fat but also sources of vitamin D and antioxidants lutein and zeaxanthin.
- **Use heart healthy fats.** Unsaturated fats can help lower LDL (lousy) cholesterol and raise HDL (healthy) cholesterol. Enjoy olive oil, canola oil, nuts, seeds and avocados. Omega-3 fats found in fatty fish (like salmon and herring), walnuts, flax and chia seeds, and soy foods help lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. All fats, healthy or not, are high in calories. Limit portions of all fats to help with weight control.
- **Limit saturated fat and trans-fat.** Saturated fats and trans-fat (also known as hydrogenated fat) can elevate LDL (lousy) cholesterol levels. Limit butter, full-fat dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese), fatty meats and processed/ baked/ fried foods.
- **Cut down on salt.** Too much salt (sodium) in the diet can raise blood pressure levels and therefore increase our risk of heart disease. Sodium is found in many processed, packaged foods and restaurant/fast food. Add flavor by cooking with garlic, onion, peppers, herbs and spices. Use low-sodium or salt-free versions of soups, salad dressings and other processed foods.
- **Limit added sugar.** Excess sugar intake can lead to obesity and poor control of blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol, all of which may lead to heart disease. Avoid excess sugar in foods like sweetened beverages (soda, sports drinks, lemonade, tea, coffee drinks), candy, and desserts.