

February is Heart Health Awareness Month

In February, along with beautiful Valentine's Day celebrations, organizations send out information about heart disease. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), "Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States" and at the NIH's website shown below you can find ways to take care of your heart as well as your cardiovascular system. We have included here two of the infographics from NIH as a starter to all the information available on the website: 1) Learn what a heart attack feels like (understand that symptoms for heart attacks are not all the same) and to act fast and 2) Take action for your heart: get started. This second infographic suggests ways to reduce the risk of heart disease. Here's wishing you much success in your heart health journey.

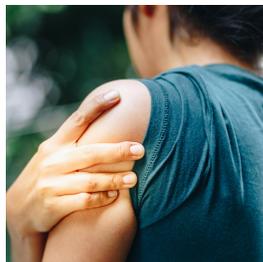
NIH website: <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/heart-truth>



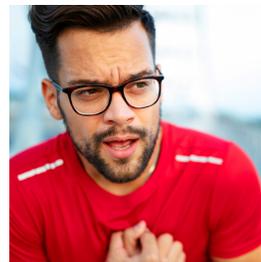
Know the heart attack warning signs.



Your chest may hurt or feel squeezed, or it may feel like heartburn or indigestion.



Your arms, back, shoulders, neck, jaw, or upper stomach (above the belly button) may hurt.



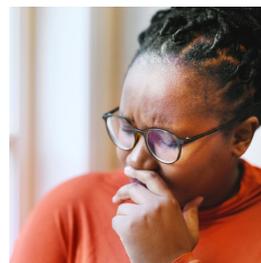
You may feel like you can't breathe.



You may feel light-headed or break out in a cold sweat.



You may feel sick to your stomach.

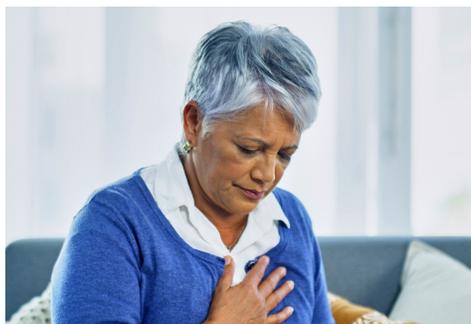


You may feel really, really tired.



To learn more about heart health, visit [hearttruth.gov](https://www.hearttruth.gov)





Understand that heart attacks are not all the same.

Some heart attacks are sudden. Other heart attacks start slowly. Your pain and other signs may go away and come back. You may not be sure if you are having a heart attack. **Don't wait, check it out right away.**

Act fast. Call 9-1-1.



Call 9-1-1 if you think you may be having a heart attack. Don't wait! If you can't call, ask a family member or friend to call 9-1-1.



Do not drive yourself to the hospital. The ambulance is the best and safest way to get there. Emergency medical services workers will start lifesaving treatments right away.

To help survive a heart attack, take these steps:

- ▶ Know the signs of a heart attack.
- ▶ Understand that heart attacks are not all the same.
- ▶ Act fast. Call 9-1-1.



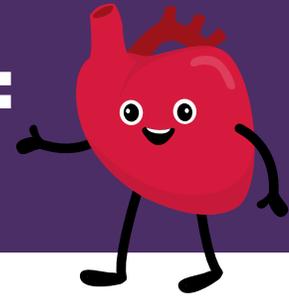
NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

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Take Action for Your Heart: Get Started!



Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, but it can often be prevented. Adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle can help you reduce the risk of heart disease and its risk factors. Take action to protect your heart by following these tips.

Get Enough Quality Sleep

Lack of sleep or getting poor-quality sleep increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions.

- Try to aim for 7-9 hours of sleep a night.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Exercise regularly, but not within 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine.



Eat Better

A flexible and balanced eating plan can help lower your high blood pressure and improve your cholesterol.

- Follow the **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan**, which can help you create a heart-healthy eating style for life.
- Read nutrition labels to pick the food lowest in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars.
- Try a mix of lean cuts of meat, eat fish once or twice a week, and eat two or more meatless meals each week.
- Consider whole fruits, dried fruits, unsalted rice cakes, fat-free and low-fat yogurt, or raw vegetables as a snack.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall health and can help you prevent and control many diseases and conditions.

- Choose healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables, yogurt, or nuts, instead of sugary or high-calorie snacks.
- Stay hydrated with water as your primary beverage.
- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise (such as brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity (like running) exercise per week.
- Consider keeping a log of what you eat throughout the day.

Be More Active

Getting enough physical activity helps to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.

- Adults should spend at least 150 minutes (2 ½ hours) each week doing physical activity.
- Sit less! Take the stairs. Park farther away. March in place or take a walk around the block.
- Try muscle-strengthening activities like lifting weights, working with resistance bands, doing sit-ups and push-ups, or some forms of yoga—whatever works for you.
- If you don't have a lot of time in your day, try being active for 10 minutes at a time. Anything that gets your heart beating faster counts!

Stop Smoking

Any amount of smoking, even light or occasional smoking, damages your heart and blood vessels.

- Select a quit date and write yourself a contract that outlines your **plan for quitting**.
- Talk with your healthcare provider about programs and products that can help you quit.
- Join a support group. Many hospitals, workplaces, and community groups offer classes to help people quit smoking.
- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW and visit smokefree.gov to get additional support.



Control Cholesterol

Unhealthy levels of **cholesterol** can lead to **high cholesterol**, which increases the risk of developing heart disease.

- Try the **Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) Program** which combines diet, physical activity, and weight management to help lower high blood cholesterol and improve heart health.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that is low in saturated fats, as these can raise LDL cholesterol levels.
- Limit alcohol consumption. Drinking too much alcohol—more than two drinks a day for men or one drink a day for women—can raise your total cholesterol level.



Manage Stress

Learning how to manage stress with healthy coping strategies helps improve your emotional and physical health.

- Use relaxation techniques that combine breathing and focused attention on pleasing thoughts and images to calm the mind and body.
- Consider meditation, as it can help to **lower stress**.
- Take a yoga class to help lower stress and improve mindfulness. It may also offer you a supportive community.

Practice Self-Care & Find Social Support

Daily acts of **self-care** can benefit your heart because **self-care is heart care**. Studies show that having positive social support, close relationships, and feeling connected to others makes it easier to stick to heart-healthy habits.

- Try to do at least one positive action for your heart health each day.
- Make the doctor's appointment you've been putting off.
- Ask family and friends to text you reminders or encouragement to help you meet your health goals.
- Join an exercise class or a weight management group to connect with other like-minded people and stay motivated.

For more information about how you can take action to keep your heart healthy, visit [hearttruth.gov](https://www.hearttruth.gov)

Manage Blood Sugar

Maintaining stable blood sugar levels is crucial for heart health, especially for people with diabetes or those at risk of developing diabetes.

- Eat a diet rich in whole foods, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- Monitor your carbohydrate intake and choose complex carbohydrates, like whole grains and legumes, to help control blood sugar levels.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about how often you should check your blood sugar levels, especially if you have diabetes.

Control Blood Pressure

Keep your blood pressure in a healthy range and keep track of your numbers. Blood pressure that's consistently higher than 130/80 mm Hg can cause serious health problems.

- Have your blood pressure checked each time you visit the doctor.
- Use a blood pressure monitor to measure your blood pressure at home and **learn how to measure it correctly**.
- Use a **blood pressure tracker** to keep a record of your numbers each reading.
- If you're pregnant or planning to be, it's especially important to keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.

