

How to Avoid Heart Disease

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According to statistics provided by the American Heart Association, over a million people a year will be diagnosed with heart disease. More than half of them will die suddenly with no previous symptoms.

Regardless of your age, it's never too soon to begin lowering your risk for heart disease. There are five things you'll need to do: manage your high blood pressure, your body weight, your diet, your diabetes (if present) and [quit smoking cigarettes](#).

Difficulty: Moderate

Instructions

things you'll need:

- A plan for managing each of your cardiac-risk factors A complete physical examination from your doctor Help from a registered dietitian and an exercise specialist

1 Manage hypertension by losing weight, by stopping drinking and smoking and by taking blood-pressure medication prescribed by your doctor.

High blood pressure (called hypertension in medical circles), like diabetes, is called one of the silent diseases because by the time that it's diagnosed, it has probably already created irreversible damage. Hypertension can be inherited or can be brought on by stress, obesity and other unhealthy lifestyle choices. Over the years, the high pressure from blood being forced through the circulation system damages the delicate lining of the coronary arteries, the arteries that supply blood to the heart.

2 Meet with a registered dietitian to develop a plan to lose weight. Studies have shown that extra pounds - especially around the mid-section - can significantly increase your risk for high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

Set a goal to lose one to two pounds a week until you reach your target weight goal. Since each pound of fat contains 3500 calories, you'll need to cut 500 calories a day out of your diet, [exercise](#) for approximately 1 hour or both, seven days a week. Approaching weight loss through a combination of diet and exercise has been proven to be the best way to lose weight and keep it off.

3 Lower your intake of cholesterol and saturated fat in your diet. It's an affordable, yet effective, means for lowering your risk for heart disease. By eating a low-fat, low-cholesterol diet, you can lower the amount of LDL, or bad cholesterol in your blood--the type of cholesterol that leads to atherosclerosis or coronary artery disease. Replace calorie-dense [foods](#) with foods that are high in fiber to help lose those extra pounds.

4 Get an annual physical examination from your doctor to evaluate your risk for diabetes. Both types of diabetes are leading risk factors for heart disease. Type I diabetics are either born with, or acquire, the inability to make sufficient amounts of insulin. Insulin is a key factor in processing blood glucose. Type II diabetics make enough insulin, but their bodies are resistant to it. Unmanaged diabetes can lead to a host of secondary diseases, including atherosclerosis and diseases of the eye. It may ultimately lead to the permanent loss of a limb. Over time, high glucose concentrations damage the

nerves and blood vessels that supply the extremities. Eventually, the tissues become damaged beyond repair until eventually the limb must be amputated to prevent further systemic damage.

If you have a family history of diabetes (either type), check with your physician. He can conduct a series of easy blood tests and catch and treat the disease early before it has had time to damage important organs.

5 Quit smoking cigarettes. Quitting smoking is the single most-effective way to lower your risk for heart disease and it has the most immediate results. Studies have shown that several years after quitting smoking, a smoker's lungs look almost like the lungs of someone who has never smoked.

There are a number of effective approaches to quitting smoking. You can quit cold turkey, use nicotine patches, chew nicotine gum or use a number of other psychological approaches to quitting. Check with your local chapter of the American Lung Association for additional tips on quitting smoking.

Tips & Warnings

- Take one day at a time. Start with the easiest things you can do to reduce your risk for heart disease. Follow the advice of health care professionals.
- Avoid making huge lifestyle changes that you'll easily abandon. Tackle one risk factor at a time. Never take direction from family members or others who are not professionals.