



HEART HEALTH & TIPS

You might not give it much thought throughout the day, but your heart is working around the clock for you. It is the most important muscle in your body because it pumps blood and oxygen to all your organs.

When your heart doesn't get the care it needs, serious problems can develop in the lining of the arteries, which then lead to plaque formation. Plaque is what leads to heart attacks and blockage of blood flow in the arteries.

Understand the conditions that affect your heart and the habits that can help prevent or manage them. Acting will help you keep your heart muscle in top shape.

HEART DISEASE: CHOLESTEROL

What is cholesterol?

You may think all cholesterol is bad, but your body needs some to work optimally.

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that your body makes, and that you also get from food. It allows your body to:

make cell membranes, many hormones, and vitamin D. The cholesterol in your blood comes from two sources: the foods you eat and your liver.

There are two types of cholesterol, High-density lipoprotein or HDL, often called good cholesterol, and low-density lipoprotein or LDL, often called bad cholesterol.

Bad cholesterol can contribute to artery-clogging plaque. Good cholesterol, on the other hand, helps remove plaque. In the end, it helps to protect you from getting heart disease. Having too much of the bad, or not enough of the good, can lead to heart disease.

How do I know if I have high cholesterol?

There are usually no symptoms of high cholesterol. That's why it's best to get your cholesterol levels checked through a blood test or home kits. Talk to your doctor about how to best prep for a home test.

That blood test will give you several numbers,

including your total cholesterol, your levels of good and bad cholesterol, and triglycerides, which is a type of fat.

Here are the cholesterol and triglyceride numbers you may want to aim for:

Cholesterol Goals

Total cholesterol	Less than 200 mg/dL
LDL/Bad Cholesterol	Less than 70 mg/dL if you already have heart disease
	Less than 100 mg/dL if you are at high risk for heart disease
	Less than 130 mg/dL if you are at low risk for heart disease
HDL/Good Cholesterol	Greater than 40 mg/dL for men and greater than 50 mg/dL for women
Triglycerides	Less than 150 mg/dL

How often should I have my cholesterol levels checked?

If you are over the age of 20 and don't have heart disease, you should have your levels checked every 4 to 6 years. You may need to get your cholesterol checked more often if you're at risk for heart disease, have high cholesterol, or have been on medications that treat high cholesterol.

How can I lower my cholesterol levels?

Medications and lifestyle changes can help you get high cholesterol under control. Even if you don't have high cholesterol, you can still make changes to your daily habits to lower your risk of heart disease.

Here are a few steps you can take:

- **Eat healthy:** Your meals should be mostly fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, poultry, fish, and nuts while limiting red meat and sugary foods and drinks.



- Bonus: Eating a heart-healthy diet can help you lose weight, which may help lower your cholesterol.
- Move more: Aim for 30 minutes of cardiovascular activity most days of the week. Think brisk walking, cycling, and swimming.
- Quit smoking: No matter how long you've been a smoker, you will still benefit from quitting.
- Avoid second-hand smoke: Even if you don't smoke, being around it can raise your risk of heart disease.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

What is high blood pressure?

When you have high blood pressure, also called hypertension, the force of blood against the walls of your arteries is high.

Without treatment, high blood pressure can damage your arteries, heart, kidneys, and other organs. It can lead to heart attacks, strokes, and kidney failure. It can also cause vision and memory loss, erectile dysfunction, fluid in the lungs, chest pain, circulatory problems, and several other conditions.

What are the symptoms of high blood pressure?

You might have heard that high blood pressure is called a "silent killer." That's because there may be no symptoms.

How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

A blood pressure test is the only way to know if your blood pressure is too high. During the test, a cuff is placed around your upper arm to measure the pressure of blood flowing through the arteries.

While it's almost impossible to tell if you have high blood pressure without a test, there is something called hypertensive crisis where your blood pressure is so high that you need emergency care. In this case, you would have symptoms. If you have high blood pressure along with severe headaches or back pain, chest discomfort, nausea, or vomiting, feeling nervous or anxious, visual problems, or seizure, call 999.

What do the numbers from a blood pressure test mean?

There are two numbers in blood pressure readings. If one or both are too high, you could have high blood pressure.

Systolic pressure is the top number. It tells you the pressure of blood flow on your artery's walls when your heart is beating and pushing blood to your body. It's the higher of the two numbers.

Diastolic pressure is the bottom number. It tells you about the pressure on your artery's walls between heartbeats when your heart is relaxing and refilling with blood.

Understanding Blood Pressure Readings

***Based on at least two readings:**

Normal	Less than 129/less than 80
At risk for high blood pressure	130-139/80-89
High blood pressure	140/90 or higher

How often should I have my blood pressure checked?

If you don't have high blood pressure, you should have your pressure tested every two years after age 20. Your doctor will test it more often if you have or are at risk for high blood pressure.

How can I lower my blood pressure?

In some cases, making lifestyle changes can lower your blood pressure. Talk to your doctor to find out if you need prescription medication as well.



Here are some habits you can follow:

- **Eat healthy:** Fill your plate with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, beans, skinless poultry and lean meats, and fatty fish like salmon, trout, and herring. Limit saturated and trans fats, salt, and added sugar. It is recommended to limit salt to 2,300 mg per day, and 1,500 mg per day for those who have high blood pressure or are at risk, African descendants, people with kidney disease, and those on medication for hypertension.
- **Get active:** If you have heart disease or any other health problem, talk with your doctor before you start exercising. If you're new to exercise or haven't exercised in a long time, start slowly, doing just a little bit at a time. Eventually, you want to do aerobic exercise, like running, biking, swimming, or brisk walking, for 30 minutes most days of the week.
- **Watch your weight:** If you're overweight, even just a small amount of weight loss (like losing 5% of your body weight) can improve your blood pressure.
- **Manage stress:** Stress can raise your blood pressure, so find ways to unwind. Exercising and getting enough sleep can help relieve tension. Or try taking 15 minutes of quiet time every day to relax. Leaning on friends and family for support and doing things you enjoy can also help you cope.
- **Avoid tobacco smoke:** If you smoke, quit. If you don't, second-hand smoke can still damage your heart, so avoid it as much as possible.
- **Follow directions for prescription medications:** If your systolic pressure is 140 or higher or your diastolic pressure is 90 or higher, your doctor may prescribe medication. If so, make sure you take it exactly as directed.
- **Limit your alcohol intake:** For women, this means no more than one drink a day. For men, it's no more than two. One drink equals 4 ounces of wine (about half a glass) or 12 ounces of beer (usually one can or bottle).
- **Eat less salt (sodium):** Most of the salt you get doesn't come from the saltshaker, but from processed foods. Cut back on packaged and prepared foods for more fresh meals made at home. Aim for less than 1,500 milligrams of sodium a day.

- **Use care with medication:** Some prescription and over-the-counter medicines can have too much sodium or may raise your blood pressure. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about all the medicines you are taking. Even things that you may consider "safe," such as anti-inflammatories or cold medication, may increase your blood pressure.

HEART-HEALTH & LIVING

What can I do in my daily life to lower my risk of heart disease?

Even when you have several risk factors for heart disease, there are things you can do to improve your chances of avoiding it. You know you should eat healthy, exercise, and quit smoking. Here are some other steps you can take:

- **Go for regular check-ups:** At least once a year, get a physical to make sure you haven't developed any conditions that would put you at risk for heart disease, and to make sure you are controlling any conditions you already have.
- **Keep tabs on your blood pressure and cholesterol:** If you're getting regular check-ups, your doctor can help you track this, but you can also use a home blood pressure device or a blood pressure machine in a pharmacy. Your pharmacist can also check your blood pressure.
- **Manage your diabetes:** If you have diabetes, make sure you're closely watching your blood sugar levels, eating well, and exercising.
- **Don't skip your medications:** If you're taking medications for blood pressure, cholesterol, or diabetes, take them as directed. If you're having unpleasant side effects, don't stop taking them. Instead, ask about other options.



What tools can help me keep an eye on my heart health at home?

If you're looking to keep close tabs on your blood pressure, weight, or amount of exercise, there are some tools that can help motivate you and track your progress. Here are a few you might consider:

Blood pressure monitor: This can help you track your blood pressure on your own. Look for an automatic, cuff-style, upper-arm monitor. Just make sure the cuff fits your arm before you buy it. Take your blood pressure twice in the morning and twice in the evening for at least 3 days to get an average reading.

Heart rate monitor: These devices tell you how hard your heart is working when you do physical activity. While many people think these are just for athletes, they can help anyone track and improve their fitness level. It can also help you avoid overdoing it. Talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program. Your doctor can also tell you what your target heart rate should be. To get the most benefit on the heart from the exercise you are doing.

Pedometer: One of the best ways to increase your activity level is to become aware of how much you move during the day, then challenge yourself to do more. A pedometer can help you do just that. For example, every 2 weeks, you might try to take 500 more steps a day. Aim for at least 10,000 steps a day.

Activity tracker: If you want something a little more high-tech than a pedometer, you might consider an activity tracker. There are dozens on the market, including some that you clip on your hip or wear as a wristband. Most track steps, distance, length of activity, and calorie burn. Some even go the extra mile and track your sleep, measure your heart rate, and act as a food diary. Most sync with computers and smartphones and offer online dashboards. And some have forums and support groups online. Be careful, as they are not all 100% accurate, but they can certainly help guide you in your pursuit of getting healthy!

Smartphone app: Don't feel like investing in a pedometer or activity tracker? Then download an app onto your smartphone. There are dozens of apps that can help you count calories and track your steps, blood pressure, and weight. With some you can earn badges or points for reaching your activity goals or connect with friends for support.

Scales: People who weigh themselves just once a week tend to be more successful at taking off extra pounds, so investing in a scale could help you reach your weight loss goals. Follow these tips: Weigh yourself on the same day, at the same time of day, on the same scale every week.

Cholesterol home test kit: These kits, which you can buy at a pharmacy or medical supply store, allow you to test your cholesterol between doctor visits. You can have the results in a matter of minutes instead of waiting days for results from your doctor. There are electronic and manual versions. If you plan to test your cholesterol often, consider an electronic kit, which will display and store your readings.

