

9 Tips to Prevent a Heart Attack

1. Take Responsibility for Your Health

Cardiovascular disease is the major cause of death in America, accounting for 34 percent of deaths, many suddenly and almost all of them premature. This is down from 40% just four decades ago, mainly due to treatment of common risk factors. If you have diabetes, your risk increases dramatically. The best prevention against heart disease and stroke is to understand the risks and treatment options. The greatest is ignorance or misinformation. The first step is take responsibility for your health.

2. Know Your Risks.

The most influential risk factor for cardiovascular disease is age – the older you are, the greater your risk. The second is your genetic make-up. If your parents, grandparents, or other relatives were afflicted with or died of heart disease, diabetes or stroke, your risk is much greater.

3. Don't Smoke or Expose Yourself to Second-hand Smoke.

The evidence is overwhelming that cigarette smoking and second-hand exposure to smoke increases the risks of heart disease, lung disease, peripheral vascular disease and stroke.

4. Maintain a Healthy Blood Pressure.

High blood pressure, called hypertension, is known as “the silent killer” as it goes without symptoms in most individuals. High blood pressure causes wear and tear of the delicate inner lining of your blood vessels. The higher your blood pressure (BP) the greater your risk. The risk begins to increase from a pressure of 115/70 mmHg and doubles for each 10 mmHg increase in systolic (the larger number) and 5mmHg increase in the diastolic (the smaller number). Heredity and increasing age raise the risks.

5. Monitor Your Cholesterol (blood lipids).

Abnormal or high blood lipids (fats) are a major contributor to cardiovascular disease. Your blood lipids include the LDL (bad cholesterol; remember as “Lousy cholesterol”), HDL (good cholesterol; remember as “Healthy cholesterol”) and triglycerides. The lower your LDL and the higher your HDL, the better your prognosis. The amount of cholesterol in your blood is determined mainly by three factors: the amount of cholesterol in your blood is determined mainly by three factors: the amount produced by the liver (this is largely genetic), the amount absorbed from the intestinal tract (some from what you eat, but a lot more from cholesterol produced by the liver and excreted into the digestive tract) and, finally, age --- your cholesterol increases with age. If you are at risk, medication is almost always necessary to lower the LDL or to raise your HDL. The ideal ratio of total cholesterol divided by HDL cholesterol is 3.0. If higher, you might need diet as therapy. The problem with diet is that, in general, it can only decrease total blood cholesterol by about 10 percent. If you have a strong family history or elevated Lp(a) (a rare abnormal cholesterol that increases the risk), drug therapy is usually needed.

6. Eat More Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables contain essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Fruits and vegetables contain essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that are vital for a healthy heart. They are naturally high in fiber, which lowers ‘bad’ LDL cholesterol by binding to it and flushing it out of the body. Fruits and vegetables are virtually free from fat and cholesterol, which are the leading causes of dangerous buildup in the arteries. It is widely acknowledged that a diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables is imperative to coronary heart disease (CHD) prevention.

7. Eat More Whole Grains

If you're focused on eating a heart-healthy diet, nix the white flour and reach for a whole-grain option instead. Whole grains contain protein, fiber, and other nutrients that white flour does not. The fiber in whole grain bread, crackers, or pasta will help to lower your cholesterol levels—reducing your risk of heart disease, stroke, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. The fiber will also help you feel full for longer so that you don't snack on foods you're better off without. The nutrients in whole grains including B-vitamins, iron, magnesium, and selenium, are all essential in the regeneration of cells, carrying oxygen throughout the body, regulating the thyroid, and boosting immune function.

8. Eat Lean Protein

There is evidence that suggests that most people are eating too much protein. We don't necessarily need to eat protein at every meal, and we certainly do not need to eat animal protein at every meal—or even every day. Meat is high in saturated fat, causing 'bad' LDL cholesterol levels to increase—a no-no for heart health. Cut back on red meat and opt for poultry and fish instead. Even better, add more plant protein to your diet and eat beans, pumpkin seeds, asparagus, and quinoa for a healthy serving of protein.

9. Eat Less Sodium

Excess sodium in the system can cause blood pressure to increase, putting your heart at risk for cardiovascular disease. When you eat foods with a lot of salt, or sodium, it causes the body to retain too much water. The result is excess fluid buildup which is connected to heart failure. You can control blood pressure and swelling in the body by decreasing your sodium intake. Stick to no more than 2,000 milligrams a day—under 1,500 mg is even better.