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How to Prevent Heart Disease

Heart disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseases.html>] is the leading cause of the death in the United States. It is also a major cause of disability. But you can take steps to improve your health and help prevent heart disease. The first step is understanding your risk of heart disease. Your risk depends on many factors, some of which are changeable and others that are not. Learning about them and working on the things that you can change can lower your risk of heart disease.

What are the heart disease risk factors that I cannot change?

There are some risk factors for heart disease that you cannot change:

- **Your age.** Your risk of heart disease increases as you get older. The risk is higher in:
 - Men age 45 and older
 - Women age 55 and older
- **Your sex.** Some risk factors may affect heart disease risk differently in **women** [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseaseinwomen.html>] than in men. For example:
 - The hormone [<https://medlineplus.gov/hormones.html>] estrogen provides women some protection against heart disease
 - Diabetes [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetes.html>] raises the risk of heart disease more in women than in men.
- **Your race or ethnicity.** Certain groups have higher risks than others. For example:
 - African Americans are more likely than Whites to die of heart disease, while Hispanic Americans are less likely to die of it
 - Asian Americans as a group have lower rates of heart disease than other groups, but South Asian Americans have higher rates
- **Your family history.** You have a greater risk if you have a close family member who had heart disease at an early age, for example if:
 - Your father or brother was diagnosed before age 55
 - Your mother or sister was diagnosed before age 65

What are the heart disease risk factors I can change and what can I do to lower my risk?

There are many heart disease risk factors that you can change. If you make these changes, you don't just help protect your heart. You can also improve your overall health and well-being.

You may have a lot of changes to make. If you need to, you can make the changes gradually, one at a time. What's most important is that you make them. Depending on your lifestyle, these changes could include:

- **Controlling your blood pressure.** High blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>] is a major risk factor for heart disease. It is important to get your blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/measuring-blood-pressure/>] checked regularly - at least once a year for most adults, and more often if you have high blood pressure. You can also take steps, including lifestyle changes, to prevent [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtopreventhighbloodpressure.html>] or control high blood pressure.

- **Keeping your cholesterol** [<https://medlineplus.gov/cholesterollevelswhayouneedtoknow.html>] and triglyceride [<https://medlineplus.gov/triglycerides.html>] **levels under control:**
 - High levels of cholesterol can clog your arteries and raise your risk of coronary artery disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/coronaryarterydisease.html>] and heart attack [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartattack.html>] . Lifestyle changes [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtolowercholesterol.html>] and medicines [<https://medlineplus.gov/cholesterolmedicines.html>] (if needed) can lower your cholesterol.
 - Triglycerides are another type of fat in the blood. High levels of triglyceride [<https://medlineplus.gov/triglycerides.html>] may also raise the risk of coronary artery disease, especially in women.
- **Staying at a healthy weight.** Being overweight or having obesity [<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>] can increase your risk of heart disease. This is mostly because they are linked to other heart disease risk factors, including high blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Controlling your weight [<https://medlineplus.gov/weightcontrol.html>] can lower these risks.
- **Eating a healthy diet.** Try to limit saturated fats [<https://medlineplus.gov/dietaryfats.html>] , foods high in sodium [<https://medlineplus.gov/sodium.html>] (salt), and added sugars [<https://medlineplus.gov/carbohydrates.html>] . Instead, eat plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. The DASH diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/dasheatingplan.html>] is an example of an eating plan that can help you to lower your blood pressure and cholesterol, two things that can lower your risk of heart disease.
- **Getting regular physical activity.** Regular physical activity has many benefits, including strengthening your heart and improving your circulation. It can also help you maintain a healthy weight and lower cholesterol and blood pressure. All of these can lower your risk of heart disease.
- **Limiting alcohol** [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcohol.html>] . Drinking too much alcohol can raise your blood pressure. It also adds extra calories, which may cause weight gain. Both of those raise your risk of heart disease. It's best not to drink, but if you do:
 - Have no more than 2 drinks per day if you are a man.
 - Have no more than 1 drink per day if you are a woman.
- **Not smoking.** Cigarette smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>] raises your blood pressure and puts you at higher risk of heart attack and stroke [<https://medlineplus.gov/stroke.html>] .
 - If you do not smoke, don't start.
 - If you do smoke, quitting [<https://medlineplus.gov/quittingsmoking.html>] will lower your risk of heart disease. You can talk with your health care provider for help in finding the best way for you to quit.
- **Managing stress.** Stress [<https://medlineplus.gov/stress.html>] is linked to heart disease in many ways. It can raise your blood pressure. Extreme stress can be a "trigger" for a heart attack. Also, some common ways of coping with stress, such as overeating, heavy drinking, and smoking, are bad for your heart. Some ways to help manage your stress include exercise, listening to music, focusing on something calm or peaceful, and meditating.
- **Managing diabetes.** Having diabetes doubles your risk of diabetic heart disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabeticheartdisease.html>] . That is because over time, high blood glucose [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodglucose.html>] (blood sugar) from diabetes can damage your blood vessels and the nerves that control your heart and blood vessels. So, it is important to get tested for diabetes [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/diabetes-tests/>] , and if you have it, to keep it under control.
- **Getting enough sleep.** If you don't get enough sleep, you raise your risk of high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes. Those three things can raise your risk of heart disease. To improve your sleep:
 - If you are an adult, try to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.
 - Make sure that you have good sleep habits [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthysleep.html>] , such as keeping a regular sleep schedule and creating a good sleeping environment in your bedroom.
 - If you have frequent sleep problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/sleepdisorders.html>] , contact your health care provider. One problem, sleep apnea [<https://medlineplus.gov/sleepapnea.html>] , causes people to briefly stop breathing many times during sleep. This interferes with your ability to get a good rest and can raise your risk of heart disease. If you think you might have sleep apnea, ask your provider about having a **sleep study**.

[<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/sleep-study/>] . And if you do have sleep apnea, make sure that you get treatment for it.

Start Here

- Healthy Recipes [<https://medlineplus.gov/recipes/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/recetas/>]
- Lifestyle Changes to Prevent a Heart Attack [<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-attack/life-after-a-heart-attack/lifestyle-changes-for-heart-attack-prevention>] (American Heart Association)
- Physical Activity and Your Heart [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/heart/physical-activity>]
 (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/salud/corazon/actividad-fisica>]
- Preventing Heart Disease [<https://www.cdc.gov/heart-disease/prevention/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Diagnosis and Tests

- Cholesterol Levels [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/cholesterol-levels/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/niveles-de-colesterol/>]
- Heart Health Tests: MedlinePlus Health Topic [<https://medlineplus.gov/hearthealthtests.html>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/hearthealthtests.html>]
- Heart-Health Screenings [<https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/consumer-healthcare/what-is-cardiovascular-disease/heart-health-screenings>] (American Heart Association)

Prevention and Risk Factors

- Community Health Worker Multicultural Resources [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/education/heart-truth/CHW/multicultural-resources>] (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - **PDF**
- Heart Disease Risk Factors You Can't Control [<https://womenshealth.gov/heart-disease-and-stroke/heart-disease/heart-disease-risk-factors/cant-control>] (Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)

Related Issues

- Daily Aspirin Therapy: Understand the Benefits and Risks [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/daily-aspirin-therapy/ART-20046797?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/daily-aspirin-therapy/art-20046797?p=1>]
- Dietary Fiber: Essential for a Healthy Diet [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/fiber/art-20043983?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/fiber/art-20043983?p=1>]
- Fasting Diet: Can It Improve My Heart Health? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/expert-answers/fasting-diet/FAQ-20058334?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/expert-answers/fasting-diet/faq-20058334?p=1>]
- Five Things to Know about Omega-3s for Heart Disease [<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/things-to-know-about-omegas-for-heart-disease>]  (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)
- Heart-Healthy Diet: Eight Steps to Prevent Heart Disease [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/heart-healthy-diet/ART-20047702?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/heart-healthy-diet/art-20047702?p=1>]
- How Do I Change Recipes? [<https://www.heart.org/-/media/files/health-topics/answers-by-heart/how-do-i-change-recipes.pdf>] **Easy-to-Read** (American Heart Association) - **PDF**
- Mediterranean Diet: Choose This Heart-Healthy Diet Option [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet/art-20047801?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet/art-20047801?p=1>]
- Nuts and Your Heart: Eating Nuts for Heart Health [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/nuts/ART-20046635?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/nuts/art-20046635?p=1>]

- Red Wine and Resveratrol: Good for Your Heart? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/red-wine/ART-20048281?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/red-wine/art-20048281?p=1>]
- What Is Heart-Healthy Living? [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/heart-healthy-living>]
 (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/salud/vida-cardiosaludable>]

Test Your Knowledge

- Healthy Meals Myths & Facts Quiz [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/002436_43.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/002436_98.htm]

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: A validated multivariable machine learning model to predict cardio-kidney risk in... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40375260>]
- Article: Randomized, Placebo-Controlled, Triple-Blind Clinical Trial of Ivabradine for the Prevention of... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40357644>]
- Article: Obesity and the Heart: Webcast March 18 2025. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40322623>]
- How to Prevent Heart Disease -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Heart+Diseases%2Fprevention++and++control%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+2+Years%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Reference Desk

- How the Heart Works [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/heart>]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/salud/corazon>]

Find an Expert

- American Heart Association [<https://www.heart.org/en/>]
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>] 

Children

- Heart Disease Risk Factors for Children and Teenagers [<https://www.texasheart.org/heart-health/heart-information-center/topics/heart-disease-risk-factors-for-children-and-teenagers/>] (Texas Heart Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.texasheart.org/heart-health/heart-information-center/topics/factores-de-riesgo-cardiovascular-para-ninos-y-adolescentes/>]
- How Can I Help My Child Be More Physically Active? [<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/aha-recs-for-physical-activity-in-children>] (American Heart Association)

Women

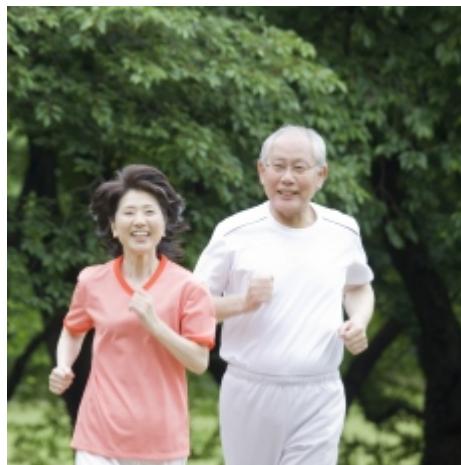
- Heart Disease and Stroke [<https://womenshealth.gov/heart-disease-and-stroke>]
(Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health)
- Heart Disease in Women: Understand Symptoms and Risk Factors [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/heart-disease/ART-20046167?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/in-depth/heart-disease/art-20046167?p=1>]
- The Heart Truth [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/heart-truth>]
 (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)

Older Adults

- Heart Health [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/heart-health>]  (National Institute on Aging)

Patient Handouts

- Give your heart a workout [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>]
- Heart Smart Basics: What to Know to Keep Yours Healthy [https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/AHM-2023-HeartSmartFactSheet_2.pdf]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - PDF
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/resources/informacion-basica-sobre-el-corazon-lo-que-hay-que-saber-para-mantener-su-corazon-sano>]
- Omega-3 fats - Good for your heart [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000767.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000767.htm>]
- Self-Care Tips for Heart Health [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/SelfCareTips-for-HeartHealth-508.pdf>]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - PDF
- Stress and your heart [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000768.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000768.htm>]
- Take Action for Your Heart: Get Started! [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/take-action-your-heart-get-started-fact-sheet>]  **Easy-to-Read** (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - PDF
- Taking Care of Our Hearts, Together [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/resources/taking-care-hearts-together>]  **Easy-to-Read** (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute) - PDF



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Give your heart a workout [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000763.htm>]

Heart disease - risk factors [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000106.htm>]

Heart disease and diet [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002436.htm>]

Omega-3 fats - Good for your heart [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000767.htm>]

Stress and your heart [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000768.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Blood Thinners [<https://medlineplus.gov/bloodthinners.html>]

Cholesterol [<https://medlineplus.gov/cholesterol.html>]

Heart Diseases [<https://medlineplus.gov/hearthdiseases.html>]

Heart Health Tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/hearthealthtests.html>]

How to Lower Cholesterol [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtolowercholesterol.html>]

How to Prevent High Blood Pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/howtopreventhighbloodpressure.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *How to Prevent Heart Disease* is the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute [<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>]

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

NIH Study Tracks Exercise with Mobile Apps to Improve Heart Health [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/nih-study-tracks-exercise-with-mobile-apps-to-improve-heart-health>]

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