

Healthy living



How to have a healthy heart



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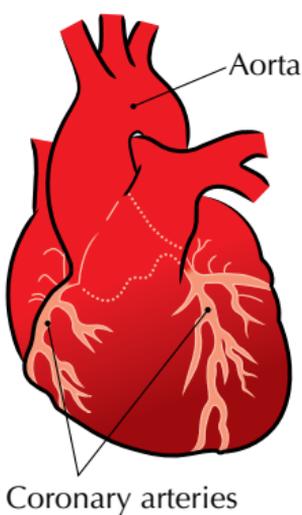
About your heart

Your heart is a vital organ – it needs care for life.

Your heart is a muscle that pumps blood to all parts of your body. The blood pumped by your heart gives your body the oxygen and nourishment it needs to keep you alive and healthy.

Your body has a network of blood vessels called arteries and veins, which carry the blood pumped by your heart around your body. Your heart and these blood vessels make up your circulatory system.

Everyone can do something to help to prevent themselves getting heart disease (coronary heart disease). Even people who already have heart disease or who have had a heart event* can take positive steps to improve their heart health and reduce their risk of further heart problems.



*Heart event includes a heart attack or a type of angina. See page 8.

Quick tip

If you lead a healthy lifestyle, you can reduce your risk of developing heart disease.

What causes heart disease?

There is no single thing that causes heart disease. However, there are 'risk factors' that increase your chance of developing it. These include 'modifiable' risk factors (ones that we can change), such as:

- smoking—both active smoking and being exposed to second-hand smoke
- having a high blood cholesterol level
- having high blood pressure
- being physically inactive
- being overweight
- having depression, being socially isolated, and having a lack of quality social support.

There are some risk factors that you can't change, such as increasing age, being male, being an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander and having a family history of early death from heart disease.

For more information about heart disease, turn to page 8.

Quick tip

The best ways to reduce your risk of developing heart disease, and to help prevent it getting worse if you already have it, are to:

- reduce or remove the modifiable risk factors
- take your medicines as prescribed by your doctor.

What can I do to have a healthy heart?

Be smoke-free

Smoking is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease. Smoking affects the arteries that supply blood to your heart and other parts of your body. It reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood and damages your artery walls. Smoking increases your risk of heart attack, stroke and peripheral arterial disease (which can lead to gangrene and limb amputation).

Quick tip

Breathing other people's smoke (second-hand smoke) is also harmful to you.

Tips for quitting

Quitting smoking can be hard at first but, like learning to ride a bike or drive a car, you can do it with planning, practice and help.

Planning

- Set a date for quitting.
- Begin to change your habits.
- Learn how to handle stress and your urges to smoke.
- Think about who and what can help you through the tough times.

Don't give up

Many people slip up after they have quit and start smoking again. Don't see this as a failure. Think about what made you smoke again. How will you deal with this situation next time? What worked and what didn't work? Learn from this and try quitting again.

Seek help

- Consider nicotine replacement products (nicotine gums, patches or lozenges), or bupropion tablets. Discuss quitting smoking with your doctor or pharmacist. They can tell you about the options available to help you to quit, and can help to check your progress.
- Talk to family members or friends and ask them for support and encouragement.
- Read self-help materials and attend quit smoking courses.
- Call the Quitline on 13 QUIT for information and advice about quitting smoking.

Enjoy healthy eating

Enjoying a variety of foods from the different food groups is the key to healthy eating. Choose:

- mainly plant-based foods, such as vegetables, fruit, legumes (e.g. chick peas, kidney beans, baked beans and lentils) and plain unsalted nuts
- wholegrain cereal foods, such as breakfast cereals, bread, pasta, noodles and rice
- moderate amounts of lean unprocessed meats, skinless poultry and reduced fat dairy products
- oily fish – include a 150 gram serve in two or three meals per week
- foods with low or reduced salt content and foods labelled ‘no added salt’, ‘low salt’ or ‘salt reduced’
- plant-based oils, such as canola, sunflower, soybean, olive and peanut oils.



Quick tip

In addition to healthy eating, some people may need long-term medicine to lower their blood cholesterol level.

Saturated and trans fats contribute to the deposits that build up in your artery walls and cause disease. You can help to lower your blood cholesterol level and stop your arteries getting more clogged by reducing the amount of saturated and trans fats that you eat.

Foods that should be limited because they are sources of saturated and trans fat include fatty and processed meats, full cream dairy products, butter, two vegetable oils (coconut and palm oils), most fried take-away foods and commercially baked products. Choose margarine spreads made from canola, olive, sunflower and soybean oils, or lower saturated fat dairy spreads instead of butter or other dairy blends.

Quick tip

It is important that people with diabetes closely monitor and manage their blood glucose level, because having diabetes also increases your risk of getting heart disease.

Be physically active

The body is designed to move. Regular, moderate-intensity physical activity is good for your heart and is a great way to have fun. Being active can also help to control other risk factors, such as having high blood pressure and being overweight.

The Heart Foundation recommends that you include at least 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity (such as brisk walking) on most, if not all, days of the week. The amount of activity can be accumulated in shorter bouts, such as three 10-minute walks.



People with heart disease get the same benefits from regular moderate-intensity physical activity as others do. If you have had a heart attack, regular moderate-intensity physical activity is a vital part of your return to normal life.

Follow the advice and guidelines that your health professionals gave you when you left hospital. Talk to your doctor about when you can start various activities again and how to build up your physical activity program. In a matter of weeks you should be able to do whatever you did before.

Manage your blood pressure

High blood pressure can strain your heart and speed up the process of coronary heart disease. Try to have regular blood pressure checks. To help to lower your blood pressure, it is important to reduce your excess body weight, be physically active, limit your alcohol intake and adopt a low salt eating pattern.

Ask your doctor for advice. Long-term medicine may be required to manage high blood pressure.

Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight

The keys to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight are to enjoy healthy eating and regular physical activity.

To achieve a healthy body weight, balance the energy (kilojoules) coming into your body through food and drinks with the energy (kilojoules) being used up by your body through regular physical activity.



Quick tip

Being overweight and carrying too much weight around your waist are risk factors for heart disease and diabetes.

For weight loss to occur, you need to use up more energy (kilojoules) through physical activity and consume less energy (kilojoules) from food and drinks.

Maintain your psychological and social health

Studies have shown that some people who have depression, are socially isolated, or do not have quality social support are at greater risk of developing heart disease.*



Depression can be treated with medical and non-medical therapies. If you think that you have depression, talking to your health professional is the best first step.

*Bunker SJ, Colquhoun DM, Esler MD, et al.

Position statement 'Stress' and coronary heart disease: psychosocial risk factors. MJA 2003 178(6): 272-276.

Remember

Like any lifestyle change, the best results are achieved with small, steady steps. Maintaining these changes is equally important, because your heart needs care for life.

What if I already have heart disease?

If you have heart disease, it is important that you follow the positive steps outlined above, take your medicines as prescribed by your doctor, have regular check-ups, and work in partnership with your health care team to prevent further heart problems.

There is no cure for heart disease, but with help from your health professionals you can maintain a heart-healthy lifestyle.

What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease is a chronic (long-term) condition that is the biggest risk to your heart.

Coronary heart disease is when the coronary arteries (the arteries that supply blood and oxygen to your heart muscle) become clogged with fatty material called 'plaque' or 'atheroma'. Plaque slowly builds up on the inner wall of the arteries, causing them to become narrow. This process is called 'atherosclerosis'.* It starts when you are young and can be well advanced by middle age.

If your arteries become too narrow, the blood supply to your heart muscle is reduced. This may lead to symptoms such as angina. If a blood clot forms in the narrowed artery and completely blocks the blood supply to part of the heart, it can cause a heart attack.

*This clogging also occurs in arteries that supply blood to the brain and other vital organs, which can cause a stroke.

Angina

Angina is temporary chest pain or discomfort. It happens when not enough oxygen-rich blood is flowing to an area of your heart muscle because one or more of the coronary arteries is too narrow.

Angina generally lasts only for a few minutes. The pain or discomfort can vary from mild to severe. If your doctor has told you that you have angina, it is important that you ask them for an action plan on what you should do if you have an angina episode.

Heart attack

A heart attack is an emergency. Getting to hospital quickly can reduce the damage to your heart and increase your chance of survival.

A heart attack happens when there is a sudden, complete blockage of an artery that supplies blood to your heart muscle (a 'coronary artery'). As a result, some of your heart muscle starts to die. If the artery stays blocked, the lack of blood permanently damages the area of your heart muscle that is supplied by that artery.

Whether or not you have coronary heart disease, it is important that you know what to do if you or someone else has a heart attack.

Will you recognise your heart attack?



Do you feel any

pain pressure heaviness tightness

In one or more of your

chest neck jaw arm/s back shoulders

You may also feel

nauseous a cold sweat dizzy short of breath

Yes

1 STOP and rest now

2 TALK Tell someone how you feel

Are your symptoms severe or getting worse? or Have your symptoms lasted 10 minutes?

Yes

3 CALL 000* Triple Zero

- Ask for an ambulance.
- Don't hang up.
- Wait for the operator's instructions.

*If calling Triple Zero (000) does not work on your mobile phone, try 112.

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For more information

If you have general questions about your heart health, the positive steps we have discussed in this brochure or heart disease, call our Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87 (local call cost) and talk to one of our trained health professionals.

You can also visit our website at www.heartfoundation.org.au.



For heart health information
1300 36 27 87
www.heartfoundation.org.au

Key points to remember to help you to have a healthy heart

Your heart needs care for life.

Everyone can do something to help to prevent themselves getting heart disease.

Making small, steady changes to your lifestyle can help to prevent you getting heart disease.

The best ways to reduce your risk of developing heart disease, and to help prevent it getting worse if you already have it, are to:

- be smoke-free
- enjoy healthy eating
- be physically active
- manage your blood pressure
- achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- maintain your psychological and social health
- take your medicines as prescribed by your doctor.

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