

Heart-Healthy Habits for Seniors

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Many seniors believe that heart disease risks are inevitable in old age. In truth, there are plenty of ways to keep your heart in great shape; start with these seven.



Heart disease is a major threat to senior health — in fact, 84 percent of people age 65 years and older die from heart disease. Though heart disease risks increase with age, it doesn't have to be an inevitable part of getting older. The right lifestyle habits and a heart-healthy diet can help protect you.

What exactly is heart disease? It's the term given to a group of different health conditions that affect the heart. In the United States, the most common form of heart disease is called coronary artery disease (CAD). CAD is often responsible for serious cardiovascular events like a heart attack, heart failure, chest pain, and irregular heartbeat, also called arrhythmia.

Know the Symptoms of Heart Disease

The warning signs of heart disease often don't appear until you're having a heart attack. Symptoms of an emergency or impending heart attack may include:

- Feeling faint
- Weakness or a sensation of light-headedness
- Having a hard time catching your breath

- Feeling nauseous or vomiting
- Feeling very full or having indigestion
- Pain in the chest or an uncomfortable pressure in the chest
- Unusual pains in the back, shoulders, or neck
- Sweating
- An irregular heartbeat

How to Reduce Your Heart Disease Risks

Many health conditions can contribute to heart disease and increase your risk of having a heart attack. Heart disease treatment and heart attack prevention requires that you treat all other contributing health problems and keep them under control. To treat heart disease you should:

- Lower high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels
- Keep diabetes under control
- Take medication to treat angina (chest pain)

There are medications that can help treat the various aspects of heart disease. To manage chest pain, nitrates, beta-blockers, and calcium channel blockers may be recommended. Your doctor may also suggest taking a daily aspirin to help reduce the risk of a heart attack.

7 Steps to Heart Disease Prevention

You can keep your heart healthy no matter how old you are, but it does take effort — possibly even changes in your everyday habits, such as eating a heart-healthy diet and increasing your activity level. Here's how to get started:

- **Get enough exercise.** This means at least 30 minutes of exercise almost every day of the week.
- **Quit smoking.** If you do smoke, it's time to quit.
- **Eat a heart-healthy diet.** Load up on fresh fruits and vegetables while limiting saturated fats, salt, and foods containing cholesterol, like fatty meats.
- **Watch your numbers.** Get regular check-ups to monitor health conditions that affect the heart, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes, and make sure they're under control with medication.
- **Reduce your alcohol intake.** Excess alcohol consumption can worsen health conditions that contribute to heart disease, like blood pressure, arrhythmias, and high cholesterol levels.
- **Minimize stress in your life.** Stress can compound many heart disease risks that seniors already face, steering you toward an unhealthy lifestyle. Find healthy outlets to relieve stress and lower your heart disease risk.
- **Watch your weight.** Too many pounds can add up to increased heart disease risk. To help prevent heart disease, maintain a healthy body weight for your size.

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Working with your doctor can help keep health problems under control. It's never too late to start living a healthy lifestyle and getting your heart disease risks in check.