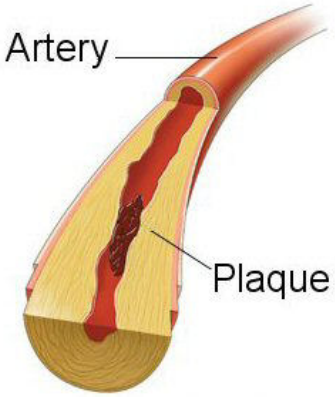
Heart Disease Prevention
Keeping Your Heart and Blood Vessels Healthy

Heart disease can lead to heart attacks and strokes. This is a leading cause of death. Heart disease can be inherited and can be caused from the lifestyle you lead. You can do a lot to keep your heart and blood vessels healthy.

WHAT SHOULD I DO EACH DAY TO KEEP MY HEART HEALTHY?

- Do not smoke.
- Follow a healthy eating plan as recommended by your caregiver or dietician.
- Be active for a total of 30 minutes most days. Ask your caregiver what activities are best for you.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Involve family and friends to help you with a healthy lifestyle.



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HOW DOES HEART DISEASE CAUSE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

- Narrowed blood vessels leave a smaller opening for blood to flow through. It is like turning on a garden hose and holding your thumb over the opening. The smaller opening makes the water shoot out with more pressure. In the same way, narrowed blood vessels can lead to high blood pressure. Other factors, such as kidney problems and being overweight, also can lead to high blood pressure.
- If you have high blood pressure you may need to take blood pressure medicine every day. Some types of blood pressure medicine can also help keep your kidneys healthy.
- Many people with diabetes also have high blood pressure. If you have heart, eye, or kidney problems from diabetes, high blood pressure can make them worse.

HOW DO MY BLOOD VESSELS GET CLOGGED?

- Cholesterol is a substance that is made by the body and used for many important functions. It is also found in food that comes from animals. When your cholesterol is high, it can stick to the insides of your blood vessels, making them narrowed and even clogged. This problem is called *atherosclerosis*.
- Narrowed and clogged blood vessels make it harder for blood to get to important body organs. This can cause problems such as:
  - Chest pain (*angina*) can cause temporary pain in your chest, arms, shoulders, or back. You may feel the pain more when your heart beats faster, such as when you exercise. The pain may go away when you rest. You also may feel very weak and sweaty.
  - Heart attack. A heart attack happens when a blood vessel in or near the heart becomes blocked. Not enough blood is getting to the heart. During a heart attack, you may have chest pain in your chest, arms, shoulders, or back along with nausea, indigestion, extreme weakness, and sweating.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT HEART DISEASE AND STROKE?

- Keep your blood pressure under control as recommended by your caregiver.
- Keep your cholesterol under control. Have it checked at least once a year. Target cholesterol levels for most people are:
  - Total blood cholesterol level: Below 200.
  - LDL (bad) cholesterol: Below 100.
  - HDL (good) cholesterol: Above 40 in men and above 50 in women.
  - Triglycerides (another type of fat in the blood): Below 150.
- Make physical activity a part of your daily routine. Check with your caregiver to learn what activities are best for you.
- Make sure that the foods you eat are “heart-healthy:”

- Include foods high in fiber, such as oat bran, oatmeal, whole-grain breads and cereals.
- Cut back on fried foods and foods high in saturated fat. This includes foods such as meats, butter, whole dairy products, shortening and coconut or palm oil.
- Avoid salty foods such as canned food, luncheon meat, salty snacks, and fast food.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.

- Drink less alcohol.
- Lose weight as recommended by your caregiver.
- If you smoke, quit. Your caregiver can help you with quitting options.
- Ask your caregiver whether you should take a daily aspirin. Studies have shown that taking aspirin can help reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Take your prescribed medicines as directed.

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK?

You may have one or more of the following warning signs:

- Chest pain or discomfort.
- Pain or discomfort in your arms, back, jaw, or neck.
- Indigestion or stomach pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweating.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Light-headedness.
- You may have no warning signs at all or they may come and go.

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF A STROKE?

A stroke happens when the blood vessels in your brain do not get enough blood. This can be caused from narrowing of the blood vessel or from a clot. A stroke can cause:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of your face, arm, or leg on one side of your body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble talking, or trouble understanding.
- Sudden dizziness, loss of balance, or trouble walking.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes or sudden double vision.
- Sudden severe headache.
- Sometimes, one or more of these warning signs may happen and then disappear. You might be having a "mini-stroke," also called a TIA (transient ischemic attack). **If you have any of these warning signs, tell your caregiver right away.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find out more about heart disease and stroke prevention, visit the American Heart Association website @ www.americanheart.org.

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