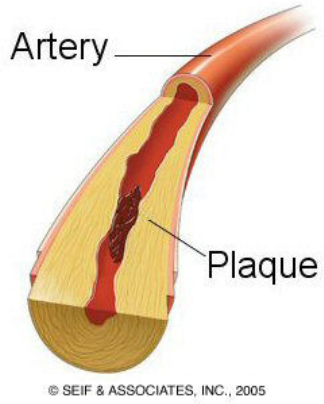
Heart Disease Prevention

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 by the lifestyle you lead. You can do a lot to keep your heart and blood vessels healthy and to greatly reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.



WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK?

See your caregiver if you experience any of the following warning signs. You may experience one or more of the following:

- 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.
- Lightheadedness.
- You may have no warning signs at all, or they may come and go.

WHAT SHOULD I DO TO KEEP MY HEART HEALTHY?

- **Do not smoke**. If you smoke, quit. Your caregiver can help you with quitting options.
- **Check and control your blood pressure.** Lowering high blood pressure may reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.
- **Control your diabetes**. If you have diabetes, you should have a caregiver manage your care. You should monitor your blood sugar carefully in order to reduce other health problems linked to diabetes.
- **Know your family history of heart disease,** and share this information with your caregiver. You are more likely to get heart disease if someone in your family has it.
- **Follow a healthy eating plan** as recommended by your caregiver or dietician. 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. Use canola and olive oil instead.
  - Avoid salty foods, such as canned food, luncheon meat, salty snacks, and fast food.
  - Eat more fruits and vegetables. When eating dairy products, make sure they are low-fat.
- **Know your cholesterol levels and keep cholesterol under control**. Cholesterol is a substance that is made by the body and is 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 narrow and even clogged. This problem is called atherosclerosis, and it can cause chest pain and heart attacks. Diet and medicine designed to lower cholesterol may reduce your risk of heart attack.
- **Have your cholesterol checked at least once a year**. You should know your total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and triglyceride levels. Your caregiver will know your ideal levels and how to get you there. Target cholesterol levels for most people are:
  - Total blood cholesterol level: Below 200.
  - LDL (bad) cholesterol: Below 100 if at high risk, below 130 if at medium risk, below 160 if at low risk.
  - 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**. Be active for a total of 30 minutes most days. Ask your caregiver what activities are best for you.
- **Maintain a healthy weight,** and lose weight, if recommended by your caregiver.
- **Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.**
- **Reduce stress.**
- 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.
- Involve family and friends to help you with a healthy lifestyle.

Document Released: 01/25/2006 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
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