

# It's Not Too Late to Manage Heart Disease



Valentines Day - That time of year when thoughts turn to matters of the heart is more than a holiday created to sell chocolates, flowers, and cards. Valentine's Day actually has a rich history that began in Ancient Rome.



Research shows that approximately 80 percent of all cardiovascular disease can be prevented by controlling high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol, along with adopting healthy lifestyle behaviors such as diet and not smoking. By choosing healthy behaviors you are also lowering your risk for other serious chronic conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes and various forms of cancer.

When you have heart disease, the little things you can do each day add up to make a big difference to your health.

**Learn your health history.** Talk to your doctor about any risks, medical conditions, or family history to ensure you have a clear picture of your health background. Knowing if you have a higher than usual risk or are predisposed to certain illnesses will help you better manage your personal health. Most often, complex heart disorders are influenced by a combination of genetic factors, environmental concerns, and lifestyle choices.

**Get your blood pressure and cholesterol checked.** Two of the largest risk factors for heart disease are high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. If either of these numbers are high, work with your doctor to get it in a healthy range.

Your total cholesterol is calculated by adding the HDL and LDL levels plus 20 percent of your triglyceride levels. LDL is low density lipoprotein and is the so called 'bad' cholesterol. Lifestyle factors such as a diet high in saturated and trans fats can raise LDL cholesterol.

High density lipoprotein (HDL) is the 'good' cholesterol. Higher levels of HDL are typically better. People with high blood triglycerides usually also have lower HDL cholesterol.

**Reduce your stress.** Research studies suggest that an emotionally upsetting event can trigger a heart attack or angina in some people. Stress can contribute to high blood pressure levels and other risk factors. Some of the ways that people manage stress—such as alcohol, using other substances, smoking, or overeating—are further risk factors for heart disease. Consider healthy stress reducing activities such as meditation, being physically active, or talking with friends or family.

**Limit alcohol consumption.** Drinking alcohol in excess can raise blood pressure, increase cardiomyopathy, stroke, or cancer. Conversely, there is a cardioprotective effect of moderate alcohol consumption. For men, no more than two drinks per day may be beneficial and for women no more than one drink per day.

It's never too late to take action in changing lifestyle and diet habits to prevent or manage heart disease.



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