

**EXPERT
ADVICE**

**Know Your
Numbers**

“Cholesterol is one of the key components of plaques that form in the arteries and cause coronary artery disease or ‘blockages in the heart arteries.’ The American Heart Association recommends cholesterol screenings beginning at age 20. It is especially important if you have a family history of heart disease so you can start making lifestyle modifications or get on medication before the cholesterol becomes a problem. Blood pressure is also important to monitor because it is a measure of how much pressure your heart has to pump against. Against higher pressure, the heart has to work harder and that can cause hypertrophy or thickening of the heart. High blood pressure or hypertension is a silent killer because it doesn’t really give any reliable signs or symptoms until damage to organs begins to occur.”



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CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH

*Top Tips for Steering
Clear of Heart Disease*

BY MARIA OLDHAM



The heart is our most vital organ, which is why it is so important to take care of it. From eating right to getting check-ups, follow these steps to heart health from the American Heart Association.

#1 KNOW YOUR FAMILY HISTORY. Heart disease is closely linked to genetics, so find out if you run a greater risk for cardiovascular issues. But don’t fret, just because it runs in your family doesn’t mean you will have it. You can’t choose your genes, but you can make your own lifestyle choices.

#2 MONITOR CHOLESTEROL. Over time, cholesterol (a soft, fat-like substance) can build up in the arteries and harden into plaque, causing narrowing and blockages. Our bodies are capable of producing all the cholesterol we need, so go easy on the salty and sugary foods. There are also good and bad forms of cholesterol—HDL and LDL—so speak with your doctor about getting tested regularly to check your levels for each.

#3 MONITOR BLOOD PRESSURE. For adults 20 years or older, depending on activity level, blood pressure should typically be about

120/80 mm Hg. HBP (high blood pressure) can be managed or prevented through a healthy lifestyle, which includes regular activity and a diet low in alcohol, salt, saturated fats and cholesterol.

#4 MANAGE YOUR WEIGHT. Risk for heart disease goes up with high levels of body fat. Find out your BMI (Body Mass Index), a numerical value of weight in relation to height, to determine if you have too much fat.

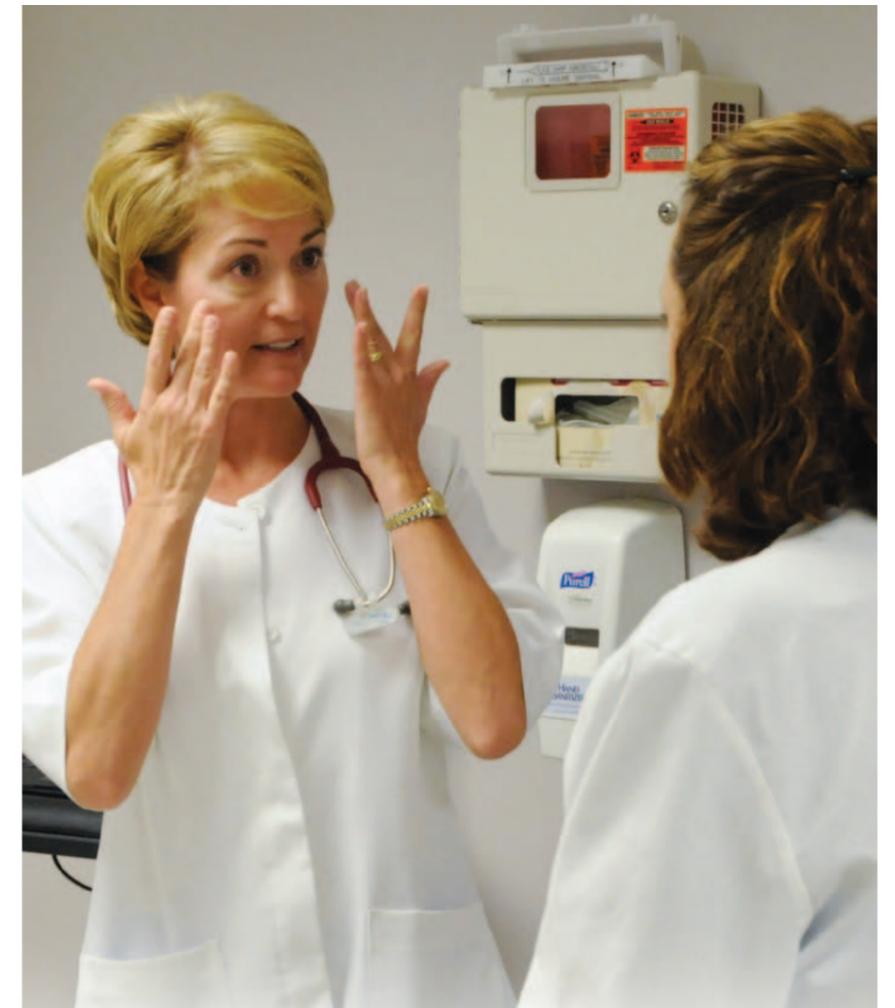
#5 QUIT SMOKING. The American Heart Association reports that around 30% of all heart disease and strokes are caused by smoking. Nicotine raises the heart rate and blood pressure, carbon monoxide and tobacco take oxygen from the heart, brain and arteries, and smoking makes the blood sticky, which can lead to blood clots. In a word, smoking is BAD.

#6 MANAGE DIABETES. The symptoms of diabetes often go unnoticed for years. Speak with your healthcare provider about the risk factors and signs, and if you are diagnosed, discuss a plan that best fits your needs.

#7 STAY ACTIVE. Exercising boosts energy levels, prevents bone loss, improves blood circulation, manages weight, blood pressure and stress, and reduces coronary heart disease and risk of stroke.

#8 WATCH WHAT YOU EAT . Maintain a balanced diet by setting realistic, consistent goals for yourself. Drink more water, eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, and watch your caloric intake. Visit heart.org for more tips.

#9 GET REGULAR HEALTH SCREENINGS. How else can you know where you stand in terms of your risk for high blood pressure or high cholesterol? The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends adults 20 and over get a blood pressure screening each regular healthcare visit or at least once every two years if blood pressure is less than 120/80 mm Hg. The AHA also suggests that healthy adults get tested for cholesterol (“fasting lipoprotein profile”) every five years, while those more at risk should get tested more frequently. ♥



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