HEART HEALTHY TIPS By Mayo Clinic Staff

6 tips to help you prevent heart disease

Heart disease may be a leading cause of death, but that doesn't mean you have to accept it as your fate. Although you lack the power to change some risk factors — such as family history, sex or age — there are some key heart disease prevention steps you can take.

You can avoid heart problems in the future by adopting a healthy lifestyle today. Here are six heart disease prevention tips to get you started.

1. Don't smoke or use tobacco

Smoking or using tobacco of any kind is one of the most significant risk factors for developing heart disease. Chemicals in tobacco can damage your heart and blood vessels, leading to narrowing of the arteries (atherosclerosis). Atherosclerosis can ultimately lead to a heart attack.

Carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke replaces some of the oxygen in your blood. This increases your blood pressure and heart rate by forcing your heart to work harder to supply enough oxygen. Women who smoke and take birth control pills are at greater risk of having a heart attack or stroke than are those who don't do either because both smoking and taking birth control pills increase the risk of blood clots.

When it comes to heart disease prevention, no amount of smoking is safe. But, the more you smoke, the greater your risk. Smokeless tobacco and low-tar and low-nicotine cigarettes also are risky, as is exposure to secondhand smoke. Even so-called "social smoking" — smoking only while at a bar or restaurant with friends — is dangerous and increases the risk of heart disease.

The good news, though, is that when you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease drops almost to that of a nonsmoker in about five years. And no matter how long or how much you smoked, you'll start reaping rewards as soon as you quit.

2. Exercise for 30 minutes on most days of the week

Getting some regular, daily exercise can reduce your risk of fatal heart disease. And when you combine physical activity with other lifestyle measures, such as maintaining a healthy weight, the payoff is even greater.

Physical activity helps you control your weight and can reduce your chances of developing other conditions that may put a strain on your heart, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

Try getting at least 30 to 60 minutes of moderately intense physical activity most days of the week. However, even shorter amounts of exercise offer heart benefits,
so if you can't meet those guidelines, don't give up. You can even get the same health benefits if you break up your workout time into three 10-minute sessions most days of the week.

And remember that activities, such as gardening, housekeeping, taking the stairs and walking the dog all count toward your total. You don't have to exercise strenuously to achieve benefits, but you can see bigger benefits by increasing the intensity, duration and frequency of your workouts.

### 3. Eat a heart-healthy diet

Eating a healthy diet can reduce your risk of heart disease. Two examples of heart-healthy food plans include the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan and the Mediterranean diet.

A diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains can help protect your heart. Beans, other low-fat sources of protein and certain types of fish also can reduce your risk of heart disease.

Limiting certain fats you eat also is important. Of the types of fat — saturated, polyunsaturated, monounsaturated and trans fat — saturated fat and trans fat are the ones to try to limit or avoid. Try to keep saturated fat to no more than 10 percent of your daily calories. And, try to keep trans fat out of your diet altogether.

Major sources of saturated fat include:

- Red meat
- Dairy products
- Coconut and palm oils

Sources of trans fat include:

- Deep-fried fast foods
- Bakery products
- Packaged snack foods
- Margarines
- Crackers

If the nutrition label has the term "partially hydrogenated," it means that product contains trans fat.

Heart-healthy eating isn't all about cutting back, though. Healthy fats from plant-based sources, such as avocado, nuts, olives and olive oil, help your heart by lowering the bad type of cholesterol.
Most people need to add more fruits and vegetables to their diet — with a goal of five to 10 servings a day. Eating that many fruits and vegetables can not only help prevent heart disease but also may help prevent cancer and improve diabetes.

Eating several servings a week of certain fish, such as salmon and mackerel, may decrease your risk of heart attack.

Following a heart-healthy diet also means keeping an eye on how much alcohol you drink. If you choose to drink alcohol, it's better for your heart to do so in moderation. For healthy adults, that means up to one drink a day for women of all ages and men older than age 65, and up to two drinks a day for men age 65 and younger. At that moderate level, alcohol can have a protective effect on your heart. More than that becomes a health hazard.

4. Maintain a healthy weight

Being overweight, especially if you carry excess weight around your middle, ups your risk of heart disease. Excess weight can lead to conditions that increase your chances of heart disease — high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

One way to see if your weight is healthy is to calculate your body mass index (BMI), which considers your height and weight in determining whether you have a healthy or unhealthy percentage of body fat. BMI numbers 25 and higher are associated with higher blood fats, higher blood pressure, and an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

The BMI is a good, but imperfect guide. Muscle weighs more than fat, for instance, and women and men who are very muscular and physically fit can have high BMIs without added health risks. Because of that, waist circumference also is a useful tool to measure how much abdominal fat you have:

- Men are considered overweight if their waist measurement is greater than 40 inches (101.6 centimeters, or cm).
- Women are overweight if their waist measurement is greater than 35 inches (88.9 cm).

Even a small weight loss can be beneficial. Reducing your weight by just 5 to 10 percent can help decrease your blood pressure, lower your blood cholesterol level and reduce your risk of diabetes.

5. Get enough quality sleep

Sleep deprivation can do more than leave you yawning throughout the day; it can harm your health. People who don't get enough sleep have a higher risk of obesity, high blood pressure, heart attack, diabetes and depression.
Most adults need seven to nine hours of sleep each night. If you wake up without your alarm clock and you feel refreshed, you're getting enough sleep. But, if you're constantly reaching for the snooze button and it's a struggle to get out of bed, you need more sleep each night.

Make sleep a priority in your life. Set a sleep schedule and stick to it by going to bed and waking up at the same times each day. Keep your bedroom dark and quiet, so it's easier to sleep.

If you feel like you've been getting enough sleep, but you're still tired throughout the day, ask your doctor if you need to be evaluated for sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea blocks the airflow through your windpipe and causes you to stop breathing temporarily. Signs and symptoms of sleep apnea include snoring loudly; gasping for air during sleep; waking up several times during the night; waking up with a headache, sore throat or dry mouth; and memory or learning problems.

Treatments for obstructive sleep apnea include losing weight or using a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device that keeps your airway open while you sleep. CPAP treatment appears to lower the risk of heart disease from sleep apnea.

6. Get regular health screenings

High blood pressure and high cholesterol can damage your heart and blood vessels. But without testing for them, you probably won't know whether you have these conditions. Regular screening can tell you what your numbers are and whether you need to take action.

- **Blood pressure.** Regular blood pressure screenings usually start in childhood. Adults should have their blood pressure checked at least every two years. You may need more-frequent checks if your numbers aren't ideal or if you have other risk factors for heart disease. Optimal blood pressure is less than 120/80 millimeters of mercury.
- **Cholesterol levels.** Adults should have their cholesterol measured at least once every five years starting at age 20 if they have risk factors for heart disease, such as obesity or high blood pressure. If you're healthy, you can start having your cholesterol screened at age 35 for men and 45 for women. Some children may need their blood cholesterol tested if they have a strong family history of heart disease.
- **Diabetes screening.** Since diabetes is a risk factor for developing heart disease, you may want to consider being screened for diabetes. Talk to your doctor about when you should have a fasting blood sugar test to check for diabetes. Depending on your risk factors, such as being overweight or having a family history of diabetes, your doctor may recommend early screening for diabetes. If your weight is normal and you don't have other risk factors for type 2 diabetes, the American Diabetes Association recommends starting screening at age 45, and then retesting every three years.