



Healthy Heart Outlook

STAYING HEALTHY ■ LIVING WELL

WINTER 2010

You've Done Your Heart Good

You've followed doctor's orders. You eat your fruits and veggies. You avoid cigarettes and alcohol. And you get plenty of exercise.

Give yourself a pat on the back—or on the heart. All those changes really do help your heart. The latest findings show healthy living leads to fewer cases of:

- High blood pressure
- Heart failure
- Heart attack—by 81 percent

In each study, healthy habits truly added up. Those that packed the most benefits:

- 1. Eating a well-balanced and varied diet.** This includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and limited amounts of meat.
- 2. Maintaining a healthy weight.** This means a body mass index (BMI) of less than 25. Go to www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi to calculate your BMI.

3. Getting active. The healthiest people exercised an average of 30 minutes a day on most days, or at least three-and-half hours every week.

4. Not smoking.

5. Not drinking too much.

That's one drink per day for women or two for men.

How do you get the most benefit for your heart? Combine all five lifestyle changes.



Saunas: Safe for Those with Heart Problems?

Could the sweating you experience during a sauna be harmful to your heart? Experts weren't sure until recently. Studies in the *American Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* conclude that saunas are safe for most people—even many with cardiovascular conditions.

In fact, some experts believe that regularly sitting in a sauna may even be good for the heart.

Sauna use may help control high blood pressure. It also may cut the risk for atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries.

Researchers believe saunas may put healthy stress on the heart—somewhat like exercise does. When you sit in a sauna, your heart works about 60 to 70 percent harder.

Your doctor can help you decide if saunas are safe for you. Saunas can be harmful for some people, such as those who have:

- Had a heart attack recently
- Unstable angina
- A severe type of aortic stenosis, or narrowing of the aortic valve.

Good Health Guidelines

For people with heart disease, it's important to make sure the following tests are kept current and to discuss these topics with your health care provider:

- Having a lipid profile done at least once a year
- Having your blood pressure checked at every office visit
- Screening for diabetes once a year, or every three years if your blood sugar reading is normal
- Reviewing your medications

Talk with your health care provider about ways to:

- Maintain a healthy diet
- Manage your weight
- Get regular exercise
- Get help to quit smoking

A CLOSER LOOK

The Benefit of a Heart-Healthy Diet

Supermarkets, restaurants, and vending machines offer thousands of tempting foods high in fat, sugar, and salt. However, they're not the best for your health—especially when you have heart disease. That's why it's worth taking the time to learn how to eat right and shop smarter. The right food choices can help you manage your weight, cholesterol, and high blood pressure in addition to preventing a heart attack or stroke. Follow these steps to make your diet more heart-healthy: Cut back on salt and foods high in sodium; eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and low-fat dairy products; consume less meat and animal products high in saturated fat and avoid trans fats; and eat fish at least twice a week.

Although these are suggested guidelines for care, please check with your benefits plan for coverage.

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Is It Heartburn or Something More Serious?



Despite the name, heartburn has nothing to do with your ticker. However, the fiery pain it causes in your chest can mimic the pain of a heart attack. How can you tell the two apart?

When Your Heart Is on the Line

Although not everyone having a heart attack has chest pain, it's the most common symptom. The pain of heart attack:

- Usually starts in the center of the chest
- Can range from mild to severe
- Lasts more than a few minutes
- May go away and come back
- Could feel more like squeezing, fullness, or pressure

Call your doctor right away if your chest pain comes with other signs of heart attack, including:

- Trouble swallowing
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Shoulder, jaw, or neck pain
- Breaking out in a cold sweat

Women are more likely to experience these other symptoms along with chest pain. Diabetics may also experience other types of symptoms.

When It's Something You Ate

Heartburn happens when acid from your stomach backs up into your esophagus. When it occurs often, it's a sign of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Chest pain from heartburn:

- May occur in the abdomen in addition to the chest
- Is often aggravated by spicy foods, onions, peppermint, chocolate, caffeine-containing beverages such as coffee, citrus fruits or juices, tomatoes, or high-fat foods.
- May be worse while lying down or bending over, or after meals

Heartburn can be treated with over-the-counter or prescription medications and lifestyle changes, such as losing weight and avoiding foods that trigger it. A good way to figure out what foods cause your symptoms is to keep a heartburn diary.

Over time, GERD can lead to bleeding or ulcers in your esophagus, and even cancer. And having heartburn or GERD doesn't mean you don't also have heart problems. So, it's important to see your doctor for frequent chest pain, no matter what the cause.



Can Psoriasis Affect Your Heart?

Psoriasis is a disease usually treated by dermatologists. Scientists are now starting to learn that it's more than skin-deep. Studies point to higher rates of heart trouble in patients with this condition.

Psoriasis Explained

About 7 million Americans suffer from psoriasis. The hallmark sign is red skin, with scaly white patches. Depending on the type, psoriasis may also cause blisters, small pink spots, or white, flaky skin. The elbows, knees, and torso are most commonly affected.

Other symptoms of psoriasis include:

- Aching or painful joints
- Thick, yellow, or pitted fingernails and toenails
- Dry, cracked skin that sometimes bleeds

If you have psoriasis, you might go for a while with no symptoms. Your skin problems may flare up in response to certain triggers. Cold weather, smoking, stress, colds and other illnesses, dry skin, insect bites, or injuries can bring it about.

Psoriasis tends to run in families. Doctors think it occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks healthy skin cells. There is no cure, but treatment can help keep symptoms at bay.

Potential Links Include Genetics, Inflammation

An old ad campaign referred to “the heartbreak of psoriasis.” But now researchers think there may actually be some connection between psoriasis and the heart. The latest studies suggest that people with psoriasis are more likely than people without it to have:

- Hardened arteries
- Heart attacks
- Coronary artery disease
- Lack of blood flow to the heart

Part of the reason for this seems to be that people with psoriasis have more risk factors for heart disease. These include high blood pressure and cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, and being obese.

But the relationship between the two diseases may go even deeper. Psoriasis is an inflammatory condition. This means it triggers the body to produce more disease-fighting cells and chemicals. Inflammation can also contribute to the buildup of fatty deposits in the arteries, a common cause of heart disease. Genetic risk factors also may have a connection to the two conditions. And some medications for psoriasis may pose heart risks.

Taking Care of Your Skin— and Your Heart

If you have psoriasis, talk with your doctor about your heart disease risk. He or she will make sure you're already getting the recommended screenings for diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. But he or she might also recommend avoiding certain psoriasis medications, such as acitretin and cyclosporine.

Follow your doctor or dermatologist's directions for managing your psoriasis. Cortisone cream or moisturizers that remove scales may relieve your symptoms.

Try following these lifestyle habits to reduce psoriasis flare-ups—and boost overall health:

1. **Quitting smoking.** Psoriasis can be aggravated by tobacco smoke. In some cases, kicking the habit is all it takes to clear up your skin. But talk with your doctor before using nicotine patches. They may trigger symptoms.
2. **Eating a healthy diet.** Some people find avoiding red meat reduces symptoms of psoriasis.
3. **Limiting your alcohol intake.** Heavy drinking is common in people with psoriasis and can cause cardiovascular problems.
4. **Maintaining a healthy weight.** You know that being overweight places your heart at risk. But it may also lead to larger or more patches of psoriasis.
5. **Managing stress.** Meditation and massage can ease tension. Also, ask your doctor about support groups for people with psoriasis and counseling to change feelings and behaviors.

Be sure to check with your benefits plan for coverage.



Recharge Your Exercise Routine

You know getting moving is good for you and your heart's health. But lately, your regular walking routine has you feeling like you're walking in circles.

Don't despair—there are more ways to exercise than you ever thought possible. And experts recommend regularly trying new things to prevent physical activity fatigue. Check out the following ways to bring new energy to your workout.

- **Take a hop, skip, and jump.** Jumping rope isn't just for schoolchildren anymore. This weight-bearing activity has the added bonus of strengthening bones.
- **Supercharge your chores.** Many things you already do around the house qualify as exercise if you do them for long enough. Try washing and waxing your car for 45 minutes to one hour, gardening for 30 to 45 minutes, or raking leaves for 30 minutes.
- **Get in the groove.** The average 150-pound person burns more than 300 calories per hour of dancing. You can do it at the gym, in a nightclub, or in the privacy of your own home. Just turn on some tunes and get moving.
- **Make a splash.** Water workouts can mean more than swimming. Aerobics classes are often taught in the shallow or deep end of the pool. Working out in water increases your flexibility, reduces your risk for injury, and keeps you cool—key since heart problems can contribute to heat-related illness in warmer weather.
- **Set a goal.** Aiming to finish a marathon or compete in a tournament can battle boredom. Training for a charity event allows you to help others while you get in shape.

Be sure to talk with your doctor before beginning any new exercise program.



Aortic stenosis. A condition that keeps your aortic valve from completely opening. This restricts blood flow away from the heart. Symptoms include shortness of breath, chest pain, fainting, and dizziness. But aortic stenosis may be present without symptoms for a long time.

Body mass index (BMI). A measurement of weight in relation to height. A BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered healthy. Anything below that range is underweight, and anything above it is overweight. A person with a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese.

Dermatologist. A doctor who treats skin, hair, and nail conditions.

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). A condition that causes the backup of food or liquid from the stomach into the esophagus. This can cause heartburn, belching, difficulty swallowing, and other symptoms.

Glycemic index (GI). A measurement of how foods raise blood sugar. High-GI foods raise blood sugar more than low-GI foods.

Arthritis and Heart Disease: A Combination You Can Prevent

Arthritis is more than joint pain. One type, called rheumatoid arthritis (RA), may increase your risk for heart disease. RA is an autoimmune disease, meaning that your immune system attacks healthy cells in your body. In the case of RA, your immune system attacks the tissues lining your joints, causing inflammation that leads to pain, swelling, and stiffness. Seventy percent of RA sufferers are women, and it is most likely to begin between ages 25 and 55.

RA is considered a risk factor for heart disease, just like high blood pressure and diabetes. Although the arthritis-heart disease connection isn't well-understood, inflammation may play a role. Fortunately, if you suffer from RA, there are steps you can take to reduce your symptoms as well as lower your risk for heart disease:

- **Exercise.** Thirty minutes of aerobic exercise five days per week can lower your heart disease risk. If your arthritis pain is keeping you from being active, try exercising in a pool or Jacuzzi.
- **Lose weight.** Being overweight or obese increases your risk for heart disease, and losing weight can reduce arthritis symptoms. Eat a balanced diet that includes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products.
- **Quit smoking.** For those with RA, the risk for heart disease may be even greater if you smoke. But even if you don't have RA, smoking increases your risk for heart disease. Quitting smoking reduces your risk for heart disease by almost half.





Beat High Blood Sugar with High-Fiber Foods

Did you know that eating carbohydrate foods that contain fiber can help keep your blood sugar levels more even throughout the day? Even better, recent research suggests that controlling your blood sugar also helps keep your heart healthy. Sometimes called “good carbs,” high-fiber fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains are examples of foods that are generally lower on the glycemic index (GI). This means these foods don’t cause a rapid rise—and fall—in your blood sugar after eating.

In addition to these benefits, they also provide a variety of other nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals. Given all this, there are lots of great reasons to make legumes, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables part of your daily diet!

Use the following tips to make heart-healthy choices:

- **Leaning on legumes.** Beans, peas, and lentils have a low GI. They’re also packed with fiber and low-fat protein. Build a meat-free meal around them.

- **Choosing cereal wisely.** Stick with rolled or steel-cut oatmeal, oat bran, muesli, and other high-fiber cereals that are made with whole grains. Look for cornflakes made with “whole cornmeal” for example.
- **Filling up on fruit.** Eat fresh, frozen, or fruit canned in juice or water, for the biggest nutrition boost. When drinking juice, choose 100 percent fruit juice and aim for a 1 cup serving.
- **Watching for good-grain buzzwords.** Whole grains include all the parts of the grain seed and are packed with good-for-you fiber and other nutrients. Look for whole wheat, bulgur, barley, brown rice, or other whole grains first on the ingredient list of breads, cereals, and pastas.
- **Varying your veggies.** Fill your diet with the colors of the rainbow to get the most vitamins and minerals. Think dark-green kale and orange sweet potatoes.

Oriental Greens

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup fresh green beans
- 1/2 cup snow peas
- 1 cup cauliflower florets
- 1 cup sliced water chestnuts, drained
- 2 large radishes, thinly sliced
- 2 spring onions (also called scallions), thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup red onion, slivered
- 1 tsp. powdered ginger
- 1/4 cup seasoned rice wine vinegar

Directions

Remove strings and ends from green beans and snow peas. Combine with cauliflower florets broken into small pieces. Add water chestnuts, radish slices, and onions. Mix powdered ginger with seasoned rice wine vinegar and pour over vegetables. Mix well. Cover and refrigerate for two hours or more. Stir occasionally and just before serving.

Per Serving

Calories 30, Fat 0 g, Cholesterol 0 mg, Sodium 12 mg, Carbohydrate 6 g, Fiber 3 g, Protein 1 g



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