



- PREPARING ●
- INFORMING ●
- RAISING AWARENESS ●

HEART

HEALTH

Controlling Your Blood Pressure

Maintaining a healthy blood pressure is a constant battle for some people, but it is a fight that they shouldn't have to face on their own.

There are a network of professionals, family members and friends all ready to help you reach and sustain your health goals.

TEAM UP

Two minds are often better than one when trying to tackle any major issue. The same is true for anyone seeking expert medical advice related to keeping their blood pressure at a safe level.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends a team-based care approach for blood pressure control, meaning a physician supported by a pharmacist, dietician, nurse and/or a community health worker.

This multi-faceted approach, the task force suggests, improves the management of major cardiovascular risk factors in outpatients, as opposed to a single physician alone.

TALK TO YOUR PHYSICIAN

Your physician is a wealth of information when it comes to finding ways to beat high blood pressure. He or she can provide diet and exercise tips that are customized to your body and medical history.

If you have issues keeping your numbers down through healthy diet and physical activity, your physician can prescribe specific medicines targeted at mitigating high rates.

It is important to be transparent with your doctor about your eating, smoking and drinking habits if you want effective results. The more they know, the more they can help you stay healthy.

KEEP A JOURNAL

We all need help remembering things sometimes. Medication schedules, blood pressure measurements and doctor's appointments, for example, can be hard to keep track of when you're busy with daily life.

A journal can help you keep notes on all of these important items and more.

It can also be a valuable tool in sharing your medical history and concerns with your doctor, providing a solid source of crucial, up-to-date information.



A Heart-Healthy Diet



Eat nutritious foods. It's a simple statement, indeed, but not always easy to live by.

As the obesity rate in America continues to bulge, doctors and researchers plug along at educating the masses about the link between bad diet and heart disease – the No. 1 killer in the United States.

QUANTITY MATTERS

A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that the quantity of fruit and vegetables in diets was more important than the variety.

Researchers followed 120,000 people for more than 20 years, during which about 6,000 developed heart disease. The people who ate the most fruits and vegetables had a 17 percent lower risk, particularly the people who added more citrus fruit and green leafy vegetables.

The chart below with recommendations from the American Heart Association offers a global glance into what you should – and shouldn't – be eating to help your chances of avoiding heart disease.

Fruits and Vegetables: At least four-and-a-half cups per day

Fish (preferably oily fish): At least two three-and-a-half-ounce servings a week

Fiber-rich Whole Grains: At least three one-ounce-equivalent servings a day

Sodium: Less than 1,500 mg a day

Sugar-sweetened Beverages: No more than 450 calories (36 ounces) a week

Nuts, Legumes and Seeds: At least four servings a week

Processed Meats: No more than two servings a week

Saturated Fat: Less than seven percent of total energy intake

Heart Disease Factors

For the first time, the American Heart Association has defined what it means to have ideal cardiovascular health.

Its goal comes from the heart. The organization is focused on improving heart health of all Americans by 20 percent while reducing deaths from cardiovascular disease – all by the year 2020.

THE SEVEN FACTORS

Don't Smoke: Cigarette smoking greatly increases your risk for heart disease. Talk to your doctor about quitting or encourage someone who smokes to stop as soon as possible.

Maintain Healthy Weight: Doctors often calculate body mass index (BMI) to determine if a person's weight is within a healthy range. It is a good number to know because being overweight or obese can increase your risk for heart disease.

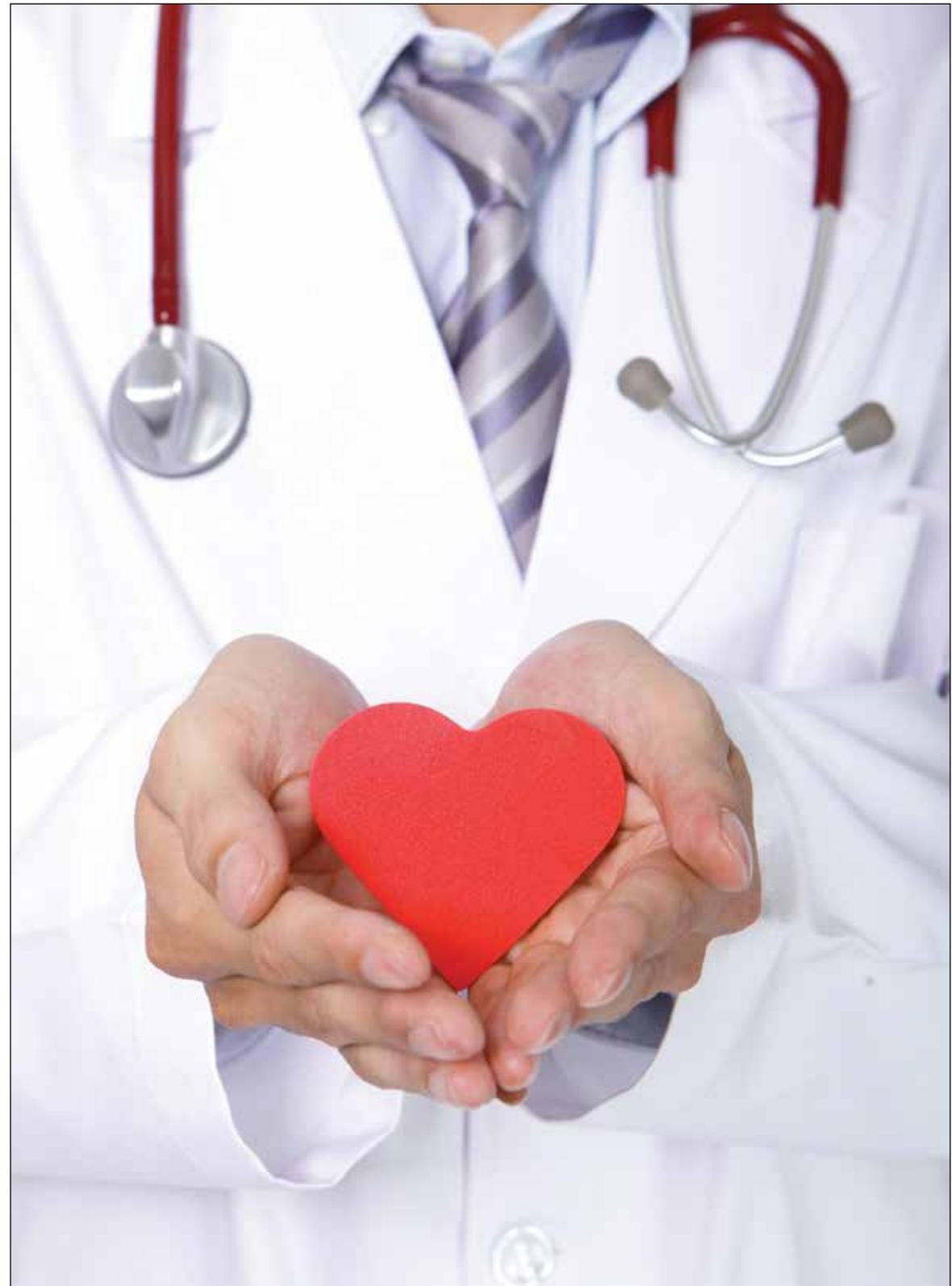
Exercise: And not just for a few minutes each day. The Surgeon General recommends that adults engage in moderate-intensity exercise for at least 30 minutes of most days of the week. This regular activity can help you maintain a healthy weight and lower your cholesterol and blood pressure.

Healthy Diet: Mixing in plenty of vegetables and fruits in into your diet can help you avoid heart disease. Opt for foods low in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol for optimum health.

Manage Blood Pressure: Keep an eye on your blood pressure regularly. You can check it at a pharmacy, a doctor's office or even at home. Doing so can help you stay heart-healthy.

Cholesterol: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention urges adults to have their cholesterol checked at least every five years. It is a simple blood test that can help alert your doctor of any increased risk factors for heart disease.

Glucose Levels: Especially for people with diabetes, it is crucial that blood sugar levels are kept in check. Talk with your doctor about how to best monitor your levels and reduce your risk for heart disease.



American Heart Month

February doesn't devote only one day to the heart anymore. Yes, you can still spoil your sweetie on Valentine's Day, but medical professionals are hoping that a month-long campaign of awareness will convince you to help your own heart, too.

American Heart Month is sponsored by the American Heart Association, which devotes February to community outreach, marketing initiatives and educational programs – all aimed at bringing attention to American heart health.

NATIONAL WEAR RED DAY

American Heart Month kicks off on Feb. 1 with National Wear Red Day, an initiative designed to pay tribute to men and women affected by heart disease.

Wearing red is also a symbol of recognizing dedicated health care professionals and honoring researchers working toward uncovering medical innovations.

The color also symbolizes you and your personal effort toward ensuring your optimum health and the health of those around you.

SIMPLE STEPS

The American Heart Association and its partners spend a lot of energy in February explaining the simple steps that Americans can take to improve their heart health.

Their message is clear: Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. but is highly preventable.

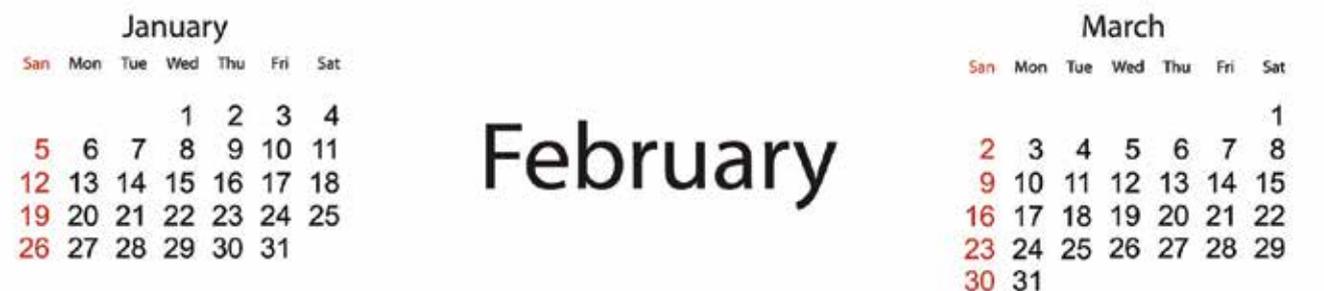
Healthy choices and proper management of health conditions can go a long way to reducing heart disease, as can an informed public dedicated to helping their fellow Americans reach peak heart health.

SPREAD THE WORD

You can do your part to help American Heart Association in its efforts. Do a little research on heart health and spread the message with your friends and family members.

You can also take your voice to social media by tweeting, posting and broadcasting heart-healthy tips and tricks.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' website, HealthFinder.gov, features an American Heart Month toolkit full of sample tweets and informational resources that can help you share the message.



Heart Health Screenings

You know the risk factors associated with heart disease: high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high blood glucose.

But how do you know which risk factors you have? Enter heart health screenings. All regular cardiovascular screening tests should begin at age 20, according to American Heart Association.

The frequency of follow-up will depend on your risk levels and the strategy your physician recommends.

Regular screening can help you detect risk factors in their earliest stages, allowing plenty of time for lifestyle changes or medication that can reduce the chance for heart disease. Check the list below to see what screenings you should be taking.

BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure generally has no symptoms and cannot be found without measurement. That's why it is labeled the silent killer.

Sixty-eight million Americans (one in three) have high blood pressure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and it is important to monitor because of its link to an increased risk for heart disease and stroke.

CHOLESTEROL

The American Heart Association recommends that you undergo fasting lipoprotein testing every five years starting at age 20. This blood test measures total cholesterol – both bad and good – and triglycerides.

Men over 45 and women over 50 may need to be tested more frequently, as could people with other cardiovascular risk factors. Things like high blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides can be improved through changes to diet, exercise and medication.

BLOOD GLUCOSE

High blood glucose levels put people at a greater risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, which can increase the chance of heart disease and stroke.

Check with your doctor about undergoing a blood glucose test, especially if you are 45 or older. The American Heart Association urges people to have their level checked at least every three years.



Stroke: The Warning Signs

Stroke is the fourth-leading cause of death in the United States, and if you've had heart issues in the past, you may be at greater risk.

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain is either blocked or bursts. This cuts off vital blood and oxygen to the brain and causes cells to die.

People who have had heart attacks may be at increased risk for stroke, which is also linked to hereditary factors and lifestyle choices. It is important to act quickly if you feel that you or someone else is experiencing a stroke.

"Time lost is brain lost," says the slogan of the American Heart Association.

Be sure to make note of what time the symptoms start as this information could be crucial to medical professionals.

The American Stroke Association wants people to remember the acronym FAST for situations involving a potential stroke. Read what each letter stands for below, and remember to always call 911 immediately if you see these signs and symptoms.

F **Face Drooping:** If either side of the face is drooping or numb, it's time to call 911. The American Stroke Association advises that if it is hard to display a straight smile, then face drooping is probably occurring.

A **Arm Weakness:** Strokes can cause weakness or numbness in the arms, making it difficult to raise them. Don't brush this issue off as common aches and pains, like so many stroke victims in the past have done.

S **Speech Difficulty:** Slurred and hard-to-understand speech are definite warning signs of a stroke. If repeating a simple phrase like "How are you today?" is difficult, a stroke could be taking place. Don't spend very much time assessing the situation. Call 911 immediately.

T **Time to call 911:** Even if any of the above symptoms go away, call 911 immediately if you think either you or someone else may be having a stroke.

OTHER SYMPTOMS

Remembering the FAST acronym is a great place to start, but you should also be aware of other symptoms of strokes.

They include sudden numbness or weakness of the leg, sudden confusion, sudden difficulty seeing in one or both eyes, dizziness, loss of balance and severe headache with no known cause.

Do not wait for these symptoms to dispel; seek immediate medical attention.



Preparing for Heart Surgery

The thought of undergoing any type of heart surgery can be overwhelming. Although you may be nervous, it is important to remember that doctors perform successful heart surgeries every day all over the world.

Doing your part to be prepared for the operation can go a long way in calming your nerves. Talk early and often to your physician about the procedure and focus your thoughts on the end goal: to have a healthier, stronger heart.

BEFORE THE SURGERY

You will most likely arrive to the hospital the day before your surgery, depending on whether you are undergoing an emergency or planned procedure.

Be ready for potential X-rays, blood tests and continuous monitoring as your surgical team gathers all pertinent patient information.

Be sure to ask any questions you may have regarding the operation, hospital facilities or potential effects after surgery.

DURING THE SURGERY

You will be given anesthesia to cause deep sleep and freedom from pain, which generally means you will remember nothing of the operation.

Depending on the scope, heart surgeries usually take three to five hours, according to American Heart Association. Family members and friends are usually allowed to stay in the waiting room, and can be notified shortly after your surgery.

After the operation, you will be transported to the intensive care or recovery unit to begin your rehabilitation from surgery.

AFTER THE SURGERY

Depending on what type of surgery you have, the road to recovery can be filled with certain challenges, especially if you're used to exerting yourself physically.

You will most likely be under strict doctor's orders to rest and avoid even moderate exercise while your heart and body heal from surgery.

Again, remember your end goal. You have made it through all of the preparation, as well as the actual surgery, and must be cautious not to take on extra physical or mental stress. Doing so can set back your recovery time and even cause complications.

