

Heart HEALTH



Know Your Family History

Family history is one of the most critical pieces of information that can help determine a person's risk for heart disease. Tendencies toward diabetes or heart issues can be passed down from one generation to the next.

The information you use to build your family history can give your physician an early heads-up that might save your life. The more information you can collect will help your doctor put together a comprehensive list of risk factors, potential symptoms and disease management strategies.

MAKE IT FUN

Finding out your family history may not sound like the most exciting endeavor, but just remember the valuable information you are uncovering could help both you and other members of your family.

In conducting family research, you can grow closer to both older and younger relatives while you build a detailed report on your family's health. Interview your elder family members over coffee or tea to make it a bonding experience.

Be sure to prompt stories from them that aren't focused solely on health. Strengthen your relationships while you find out vital information.

HOW TO ORGANIZE AND USE A FAMILY HISTORY

Once you have gathered all of the information needed to build a strong family history, type it neatly and print copies. Also share it with your other family members, either



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through email, hard copies or a shared website that allows access to multiple parties.

Bring your family history to any doctor's appointment and

be sure to talk it over with your physician. This collaboration can be invaluable in helping your health care provider gain a clear picture of what to watch

for in your health.

Remember that your family health history is never a finished product. It's an ongoing collection of information to

which you should continuously add over the years. Involve other family members and pass on the passion for family history to younger relatives.

American Heart Month

How strong is your heart this February? American Heart Month is nationally recognized initiative created to build awareness of heart disease and the various ways of identifying and preventing it.

American Heart Month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Million Hearts — a national effort to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes in the United States by 2017 — are working together to encourage Americans to know their blood pressure.

They are also imploring people to take control of their goal, meaning to bring their blood pressure down to normal levels and keep it there.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure is a leading cause of heart disease and stroke, according to the CDC, affecting more than 67 million Americans. The CDC reports that people with high blood pressure are four times more likely to die from a stroke and three times more likely to die from heart disease, compared to those with normal blood pressure.

The CDC attributes the large number of people suffering from high blood pressure to a collection of risk factors, including the following:

- **Skipping medicine.** If you require blood pressure medicine to get your numbers under control, set a timer on your phone to remember to take your medicine at the same time each day.

- **Increased sodium intake.** Most Americans consume too much sodium, according to the CDC. This can raise blood pressure.

WORK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Your doctor is your best friend in lowering and maintaining a healthy blood pressure. Meet with him this

American Heart Month to figure out if you have high blood pressure, which often shows no signs or symptoms.

Ask your doctor what your blood pressure should be and set a goal to lower it, making sure to consult with your physician on safe ways to do so.

Keep your healthcare team updated on your goals and progress as you work through your program.

You can check your blood pressure at home or get screened at your doctor's office. Drugstores also offer free blood pressure checks, making doing so a convenient opportunity to stay on top of your numbers.

Stop Stressing

With many American juggling family time, work and sleep, stress can seem like a natural part of our lives these days. How we handle it can impact our heart health and play a determining role in our overall well-being.

So how do you handle stress? Do you keep it bottled up inside until you are able to effectively deal with it? Or do you take it out on others, looking to pull others into your stressful situation?

These are not the answers to handling stress, which can affect behaviors and factors that increase the chance of heart attack, high blood pressure, cholesterol levels, smoking, physical inactivity and overeating.

Instead of handling stress in a negative

way, step back and take a deep breath — and do so for your heart's overall health.

IDENTIFYING STRESS

Stress presents itself in different ways, varying from person to person. Some people know recognize stomachaches, back strains and other physical indicators as tell-tale signs of the body or mind undergoing a stressful situation. These types of physical conditions can greatly reduce your energy level, making you even more inclined to let stress take over your body, mind and life.

With all of these factors working against

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The Silent Heart Attack

Would you know how to identify a silent heart attack if you or a loved one were experiencing one? Heart attacks are not always accompanied by obvious indicators, such as chest pain or shortness of breath.

In fact, a heart attack can happen without a person knowing it. A silent heart attack is medically referred to as silent ischemia — a lack of oxygen to the heart muscle, according to the American Heart Association. When the flow of blood is blocked in the coronary arteries by a buildup of plaque,

scarring and damage to the heart muscle can occur.

NOTICEABLE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of a silent heart attack can include fatigue or any odd feeling in your chest. Sometimes it takes a physician ordering an MRI or EKG to deduce that someone has suffered a silent heart attack.

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Studies have examined how well treatment or therapies work in reducing the effects of stress on cardiovascular disease, and the results have shown positive links.

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your body, it's easy to see how the cardiovascular system could quickly become compromised.

So how is stress physically related to the heart? When you're stressed, your body releases adrenaline, a hormone that temporarily causes your breathing and heart rate to speed up and your blood pressure to rise. Depending on how long you're stressed, your body may experience this set of circumstances off and on for days at a time.

DEALING WITH STRESS

Managing stress is a difficult but not

insurmountable challenge. A few studies cited by the American Heart Association have examined how well treatment or therapies work in reducing the effects of stress on cardiovascular disease, and the results have shown positive links.

The best place to start when dealing with your stress is a qualified professional. Work with your physician, psychotherapist or counselor to draw out specific people, trends or experiences that cause you this stress.

Tell your physician how you're feeling. Depending on the severity of the situation, they will be able to refer you to a specialist who can offer effective treatment or preventive strategies.

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People who experience a silent heart attack are likely to report non-specific and subtle symptoms including indigestion or a case of the flu. Other indicators can include discomfort in the chest, jaw, upper back or arms.

If you feel any of these symptoms coming on, it's critical to stay calm and call 911 immediately. Try to remember specific symptoms to help your physicians treat you accordingly.

DEVELOPING A PLAN

While identifying and acting on the symptoms of a silent heart attack can be a difficult task, it is much easier to pinpoint risk factors. In general, they are the same as those for recognized heart attacks, and include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, family history of heart disease, obesity and age.

A silent heart attack can be just as dangerous as the more standard variety and can put people at greater risk

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of other heart problems due to the scarring and damage to the heart.

These issues can be amplified because treatment may not be sought right away after a silent heart attack.

Now that you know the risk factors, it's crucial that you put into action a plan to minimize your chances of experiencing a silent heart attack. This means exercising regularly and avoiding smoking.

Always listen to your body to recognize any potential issues with your heart health.

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Women & Heart Disease

While it can sometimes be thought of as a man's disease, about the same number of women and men die each year from heart disease in the United States.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for African American and white women in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Here are some other recent statistics from the CDC:

- About 5.8 percent of all white women,

7.6 percent of black women, and 5.6 percent of Mexican American women have coronary heart disease.

- Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease have no previous symptoms.
- Women are more likely to describe chest pain that is sharp and burning and more frequently have pain in the neck, jaw,

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Warning Signs

Heart failure comes with it many symptoms. While you're not necessarily guaranteed to be tipped off by clear-cut signs if you're experiencing a serious heart issue, it is important to understand how to handle such clues.

From shortness of breath to fluid buildup, it is vital to educate yourself on the most common indicators. Remember to immediately report any heart-related concerns to your physician, especially if you have more than one.

Your physician can put you through a battery of tests to identify even the smallest of heart issues. Knowledge is power, so being able to consult with your physician on potential warning signs or preventive measures can keep you in optimal heart health.

If your physician diagnoses you with heart failure, it's even more important to continuously track symptoms and report sudden changes to your healthcare team.



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SHORTNESS OF BREATH

Shortness of breath is a common indicator of heart-related issues. Have you been running out of breath during otherwise rou-

tine activities, such as walking up stairs or playing catch with your kids? Have you been waking up suddenly, unable to breathe like you normally do?

These can be simple yet telling symptoms to be concerned about because they can signify blood backing up in the pulmonary veins, indicating that the heart can't

keep up with the supply.

Other related warning signs include waking up feeling tired or anxious. If you have to prop up your body while resting because of difficulty breathing, it is time to check in with your physician for a checkup.

FATIGUE

A perpetual tired feeling and difficulty handling everyday activities such as shopping, walking or yardwork can be another serious sign of a heart-related issue.

Why do these symptoms occur? When the heart can't pump enough blood to meet the needs of body tissues, it diverts blood away from the less vital organs and sends it to the heart and brain.

This lack of blood in the limbs can make it harder to exert energy to perform common tasks.

Another key symptom to look out for is fluid buildup in the feet, ankles, legs or abdomen. Be sure to take any sign of heart disease as a serious one.

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throat, abdomen or back.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

While some women have no symptoms, others experience angina, which is defined as dull, heavy to sharp chest pain or discomfort. Other symp-

toms include pain in the neck, jaw, throat, abdomen or back. These may occur during rest or physical activity, making it difficult to identify as a sure-fire symptom.

Several medical conditions and lifestyle choices can put people at a higher risk for heart disease, according to the

CDC. They include diabetes; being overweight or obese; poor diet; physical inactivity; and excessive alcohol use.

CDC RECOMMENDATIONS

There are specific steps that both men and women can take to reduce their chances of getting heart disease, includ-

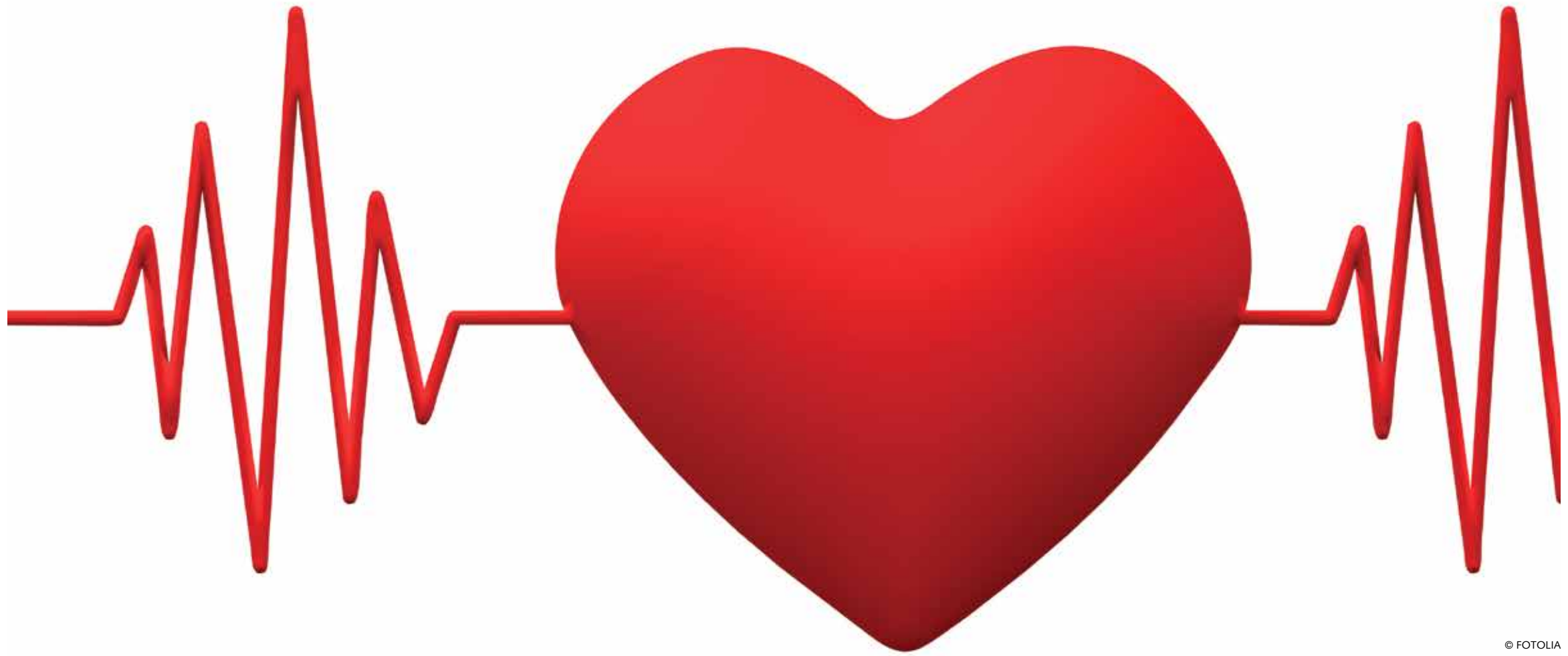
ing knowing and controlling your blood pressure. You also should consider being tested for diabetes, which raises your chances of heart disease.

Here are some other recommendations from the CDC:

- Quit smoking;
- Discuss checking your cholesterol and triglycerides

with your healthcare provider;

- Make healthy food choices, as being overweight and obese raises your risk of heart disease;
- Limit alcohol intake to one drink a day; and
- Lower your stress level and find healthy ways to cope with stress.



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By the Numbers

Sometimes numbers say it all. The following statistics from The Heart Foundation help paint a picture of exactly how important heart health is to the United States' population.

Do some research on your own within your own family to determine if you are at any increased risk for any type of heart disease.

- Heart disease, which includes heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases, is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for people of most racial and

ethnic groups in the United States, including African Americans, Hispanics and whites. For Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders and American Indians or Alaska Natives, heart disease is second only to cancer.

- Cardiovascular diseases claim more lives than all forms of cancer combined.
- Coronary heart disease is the

most common type of heart disease, killing nearly 380,000 people annually.

- In the United States, someone has a heart attack every 34 seconds. Every 60 seconds, someone in the United States dies from a heart disease-related event.
- About 720,000 people in the U.S. suffer heart attacks each year. Of

these, 515,000 are a first heart attack and 205,000 happen in people who have already had a heart attack.

- More than 300,000 people annually experience out-of-hospital cardiac arrests in the United States.
- Direct and indirect costs of heart disease total more than \$320.1 billion. That includes health expenditures and lost productivity.

