



Healthy Heart

One of every three Americans has at least one form of heart disease. How's your heart health?'

What to look for. While serious cardiac events can occur without warning, many times people do recognize some symptoms - the key is to pay attention to your body and seek medical treatment when you feel something isn't right.

A common symptom is chest pain that's noticeable when you're active, excited or stressed, or after you've eaten a large meal or been exposed to cold temperatures. This pain is often described as weight or pressure, aching, burning or even numbness. While it's usually felt in the chest, you may also feel it in your left shoulder, arms, neck, back or jaw. Other symptoms include shortness of breath; irregular, faster or skipped heart beats; weakness or dizziness; nausea; or perspiration. On the next page, you will see a comprehensive list of symptoms, but everyone is different - you could have a serious heart problem but experience none of the symptoms listed.

The heart facts

Your heart is about the size of your fist.

It takes only 60 seconds for your blood to travel away from your heart, through your entire body and back to your heart again.

Your body contains about two gallons of blood.

Every year since 1920, heart disease has killed more Americans than any other cause.

Types of heart disease

A number of conditions fall under the umbrella of heart disease, and although some call for more immediate medical attention than others, all are serious. If you think you might have one of the conditions described here, you should speak with your doctor as soon as possible. Common types of heart disease include:

- **Coronary artery disease**, when the arteries become clogged or even completely blocked, causing a heart attack
- **Congestive heart failure**, when the heart cannot pump enough blood due to disease, injury or overexertion
- **Arrhythmias or irregular heart beats** that feel like pounding, fluttering or discomfort in your chest, and can make you feel dizzy, light-headed, short of breath, and weak or tired
- **Heart valve disease**, when the heart valves do not work as they should
- **Congenital heart disease**, when the heart is not formed properly
- **Cardiomyopathy or heart muscle disease**, a progressive disease causing the heart to become enlarged or the tissue to become stiff
- **Pericarditis**, an inflammation of the membranes around the heart, caused by infection, trauma or other disease

Beating the odds

Some of the risk factors for developing heart disease are hereditary; others are caused by poor nutrition and lifestyle habits. Gender, race, age and family history are out of your control, but you can be aware of these risks and make lifestyle adjustments to improve your heart health.

If you walk just 30 minutes most days, you reduce your chance of developing heart disease. Quitting smoking and refusing to allow others to smoke around you will reduce your risk and theirs. Losing weight, lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, and responding to stress in a healthy way can also help you avoid developing these serious conditions.

For the last century, cardiovascular disease has caused more deaths in the United States than any other cause.' But by understanding your risk factors and making healthy decisions about your diet and lifestyle, you can significantly improve your odds.

Resources

For more information about heart health, check out the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Heart Disease section at

cdc.gov/heartdisease/

Or visit WebMD for general heart health information and quizzes, including this one about heart attacks:

webmd.com

What to look for

You may experience some, all or none of these symptoms. Still, if you feel something is not right, contact your doctor.

Symptoms of heart disease

- Heart palpitations (a sudden pounding, fluttering, or racing feeling in the heart)
- Dizziness, light-headedness or fainting
- Shortness of breath during activity or even when laying down flat in bed
- Chest discomfort (pain or pressure with activity, after meals or when going out in cold weather)
- Weakness or fatigue; lack of energy
- Swelling of the ankles, legs, feet or abdomen; bloated feeling
- Quick weight gain (two or three pounds in one day is possible)
- Coughing up white mucus
- Nausea
- Low-grade fever
- Sweating

Symptoms of a heart attack

- Pressure, heaviness, or pain in the chest, arm or below the breastbone
- Discomfort radiating to the back, jaw, throat or arm
- Fullness, indigestion or choking feeling (may feel like heartburn)
- Sweating, nausea, vomiting or dizziness
- Extreme weakness, anxiety or shortness of breath
- Rapid or irregular heartbeats

