

# Health Insights

## February 2021

## Heart Disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both women and men in the United States, causing about 647,000 deaths annually, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That means that 1 in 4 deaths are caused by heart disease.

### What is heart disease?

Heart disease is a term used to refer to several different types of heart conditions. Of all the different conditions, coronary artery disease—caused by plaque buildup in the walls of the heart’s arteries—is the most common. Other common forms of heart disease include:

- Heart failure
- Arrhythmia
- Valvular heart disease
- Aortic aneurysm
- Congenital heart defects

### What are the symptoms of heart disease?

The symptoms of heart disease can vary, and some people may not even know they have a heart condition until they have a heart attack. Common signs and symptoms of heart disease include shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pain, heart palpitations, weakness, and fatigue.

### What are the risks of developing heart disease?

There are certain uncontrollable factors that increase your risk of heart disease, including age, sex, and family history. Generally speaking, those with a family history of heart disease, men, and older people have a higher risk of developing a heart condition. However, other factors that increase your risk for heart disease, such as stress, inactivity, obesity, diabetes, smoking, and a poor diet, are controllable.

### Is heart disease preventable?

In many cases, heart disease can be prevented by living a healthy lifestyle and properly managing health conditions. Here are some tips that may help you prevent heart disease:

- Refrain from smoking.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit your sodium intake.
- Eat a well-balanced, healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Manage your stress.
- Limit your alcohol intake.



# Mental Health Moment

## Too Much Ultra-Processed Food Linked to Lower Heart Health

Researchers at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that for every 5% increase in calories from ultra-processed foods a person ate, there was a corresponding decrease in overall cardiovascular health. Adults who ate approximately 70% of their calories from ultra-processed foods were half as likely to have "ideal" cardiovascular health as compared to people who ate 40% or less of their calories from ultra-processed foods.

Ultra-processed foods are made entirely or mostly from substances extracted from foods, such as fats, starches, hydrogenated fats, added sugar, modified starch, and other compounds and include cosmetic additives such as artificial flavors, colors, or emulsifiers. Examples include soft drinks, packaged salty snacks, cookies, cakes, processed meats, chicken nuggets, powdered and packaged instant soups, and many items often marketed as "convenience foods."

"Healthy diets play an important role in maintaining a healthy heart and blood vessels," said Zefeng Zhang, M.D., Ph.D., an epidemiologist at the CDC. "Eating ultra-processed foods often displaces healthier foods that are rich in nutrients, like fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein, which are strongly linked to good heart health. In addition, ultra-processed foods are often high in salt, added sugars, saturated fat, and other substances associated with increasing the risk of heart disease."

Donna Arnett, Ph.D., past-president of the American Heart Association and dean of the College of Public Health at the University of Kentucky in Lexington says, "There are things you can do every day to improve your health just a little bit. For example, instead of grabbing that loaf of white bread, grab a loaf of bread that's whole grain or wheat bread. Try replacing a hamburger with fish once or twice a week. Making small changes can add up to better heart health."

American Heart Association. "Too much ultra-processed food linked to lower heart health." ScienceDaily. [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/11/191111084920.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/11/191111084920.htm) (accessed January 14, 2021).

## The Heart and Mind Connection

The Mind and the Heart are intrinsically connected and have a significant impact on how the other functions. Because of this, mental health can have a dramatic effect on heart health and vice versa.

To combat the potentially life-threatening damage stress could have on your heart, there are several meditation techniques you can try to reduce stress, improve the immune system, and prepare the body for traumatic situations in the future. Try one or more of these meditation techniques next time you are feeling stressed and see what works for you.

### Three ways to meditate:

In severe cases, your doctor can prescribe medication, but oftentimes self-help tactics can be just as effective. Enjoy the present and try not to worry about what may be lacking.

- Go into a quiet environment and sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Then, focus your attention on one thing such as a word, phrase, or sound. Repeat that one thing over and over again. If you find that your mind wanders, refocus back. Do this exercise for 20 minutes for a break from the stressors of your life.
- Progressive relaxation is another useful exercise. Lie down or sit in a quiet area. Focus your attention on the muscle groups in your feet and slowly move through each group until you reach your head. As you go through each muscle group, try to imagine that you are actually breathing through those organs. As you "exhale", release the tension from the group. As an alternative, you may tighten the muscles in each group for several seconds and then physically release the tension.
- A third meditation exercise is to imagine that you are clearing your body of the toxins that you want to get rid of. For instance, visualize that you are ridding your arteries of plaque. Concentrate on releasing that energy, which will ultimately reduce the tension in your mind.



## Overnight Oats in a Jar

Prepare a heart-healthy breakfast packed with fiber, vitamins, and nutrients ahead of time to make busy mornings easier!

### Ingredients:

- ¼ C quick oats
- ½ C blueberries
- ½ C unsweetened almond, skim or soy milk
- 4-5 drops of vanilla or your favorite sweetener
- ¼ Medium banana, sliced
- A pinch of cinnamon
- ½ Tbsp chia seeds

### Instructions:

1. Place all the ingredients in a jar, shake, cover, and refrigerate overnight.
2. The next morning, add your favorite toppings such as nuts or granola and enjoy!

Nutrition Information: Serving 1 jar, Calories: 236 kcal, Carbohydrates: 34.5 g, Protein: 6 g, Fat: 10 g, Saturated Fat: 0.5 g, Sodium: 95 mg, Fiber: 8.5 g, Sugar: 11.5 g

Homolka, Gina, "OVERNIGHT OATS IN A JAR", *SkinnyTaste*, June 18 2012, <https://www.skinnytaste.com/skinny-overnight-oats-in-jar/>

**Disclaimer:** The foregoing constitutes general information or recommendations and does not constitute medical advice and may not fit a specific situation. Contact your medical provider for medical advice or further information. In the case of an emergency, immediately contact emergency services.



## Heart Disease Risk Quiz

Answer each question below and add up the points from each of your answers to find out what your possible heart disease risk is.

### 1. What's your blood pressure?

- a. Below 120/80 (0)
- b. Between 120/80 – 140/90 (+1)
- c. Above 140/90 (+3)
- d. Don't know (+1)

### 2. What's your cholesterol?

- a. HDL ('good' cholesterol) above 50, LDL ('bad' cholesterol) below 130, triglycerides (fat levels in the blood) less than 150 (0)
- b. HDL below 50, LDL above 130, triglycerides above 150 (+2)
- c. Don't know (+1)

### 3. How often do you eat fried foods?

- a. Once a month (+1)
- b. Several times a month (+2)
- c. Never (0)

### 4. Does anyone in your family have heart disease?

- a. Yes, my mother had problems before age 65, or my father before age 55 (+2)
- b. No (0)
- c. Don't know (+1)

### 5. On a typical weekend night, you:

- a. Have one glass of wine or beer (+1)
- b. Several times a month (+2)
- c. Skip the alcohol (0)

### 6. How many cigarettes have you smoked this week?

- a. None (0)
- b. Just a few (+3)
- c. Half a pack or more a day (+8)

### 7. How many colors were in your last meal?

- a. 1 – for example, chicken and rice (+2)
- b. 2 to 4 – some vegetables (+1)
- c. 4 or more – for example, a salad and some vegetables (0)

### 8. How do you feel after climbing three flights of stairs?

- a. Fine or even energized (0)
- b. Winded (+1)
- c. Who knows? I never climb stairs (+2)

### 9. What's your body mass index (BMI)?

- a. 18.5 to 24.9 (0)
- b. 25 to 29.9 (+1)
- c. 30 or above (+2)

See page 4 for quiz results

# Healthy Habits Calendar

## February 2021 – Heart Health

Heart Health Awareness Month is a great opportunity to focus on small, healthy habits that can improve your heart health.

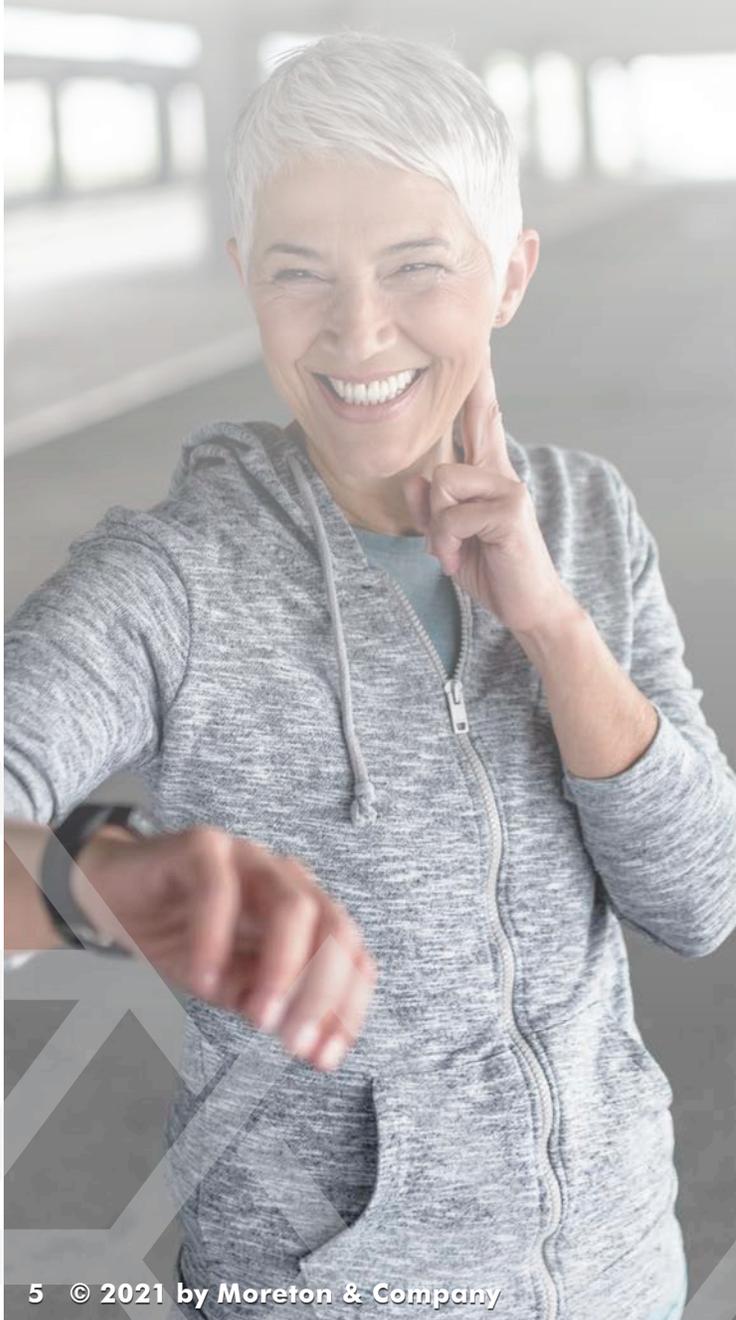
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 <b>Happy Heart Health Month</b> Start your walking challenge.	2	3 <b>Wellness Wednesday:</b> Set a goal to limit intake of sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages this month.	4 <b>Thursday Check-in:</b> Get your blood pressure checked.	5 <b>Fitness Friday:</b> Muscle-strengthening activities are important for heart health. Lift weights, work with resistance bands, or climb stairs.	6
7 <b>Self-Care Sunday:</b> Prepare some healthy meals for the upcoming week.	8	9 <b>Tuesday's Tip:</b> Decrease your risk of heart disease with a leafy, green salad.	10 <b>Wellness Wednesday:</b> Go to bed an hour earlier today.	11	12	13 Don't forget about this month's walking challenge.
14	15 <b>Monday Motivation:</b> Listen to a podcast or read an article on a topic that interests you.	16	17 <b>Wellness Wednesday:</b> Take some time to meditate today.	18 <b>Thursday Check-in:</b> Review the warning signs of a heart attack on the CDC website.	19 <b>Fitness Friday:</b> Try a Cardio or Zumba workout video online.	20
21 <b>Self-Care Sunday:</b> Limit screen time today.	22	23 <b>Tuesday's Tip:</b> Take a 10-minute walk after all 3 meals to lower Blood Sugar.	24 <b>Wellness Wednesday:</b> Go meat-less today to lower cholesterol and improve heart health.	25	26	27 <b>Saturday Service:</b> Find a way to give back today.

28

**Results from Quiz: 1-2:** You're on the right track to preventing heart disease. Exercise, eating right and avoiding cigarettes can help prevent 80 percent of heart disease. **3-7:** One or two harmful habits can increase your chances of developing heart disease. Simply knowing your risk factors is also important to reducing your risk, especially if you need to reduce your cholesterol or blood pressure. **8 or higher:** Get to the doctor! Make the commitment to one healthy behavior change, such as exercising or quitting smoking.

# Week 1:

# Walking for Heart Health



Regular physical activity can help you keep your heart healthy. Brisk walking or other forms of cardiovascular exercise for as little as 30 minutes a day can help your heart in the following ways:

- Improves blood circulation, which reduces the risk of heart disease
- Keeps weight under control
- Helps in the battle to quit smoking
- Improves blood cholesterol levels
- Prevents and manages high blood pressure
- Helps manage stress
- Reduces coronary heart disease in women by 30-40%
- Reduces risk of stroke by 20% in moderately active people and by 27% in highly active ones
- Establishes good heart-healthy habits in children and counters the conditions (obesity, high blood pressure, poor cholesterol levels, poor lifestyle habits, etc.) that lead to heart attack and stroke later in life.

**Weekly Challenge:** Try to accumulate 150 minutes of brisk walking or a similar form of cardiovascular exercise.

Each day you exercise, record the number of minutes under the day of the week. If you are not currently physically active, start slowly and increase your activity over time.

## Record the Number of Minutes You Exercise in Each Day

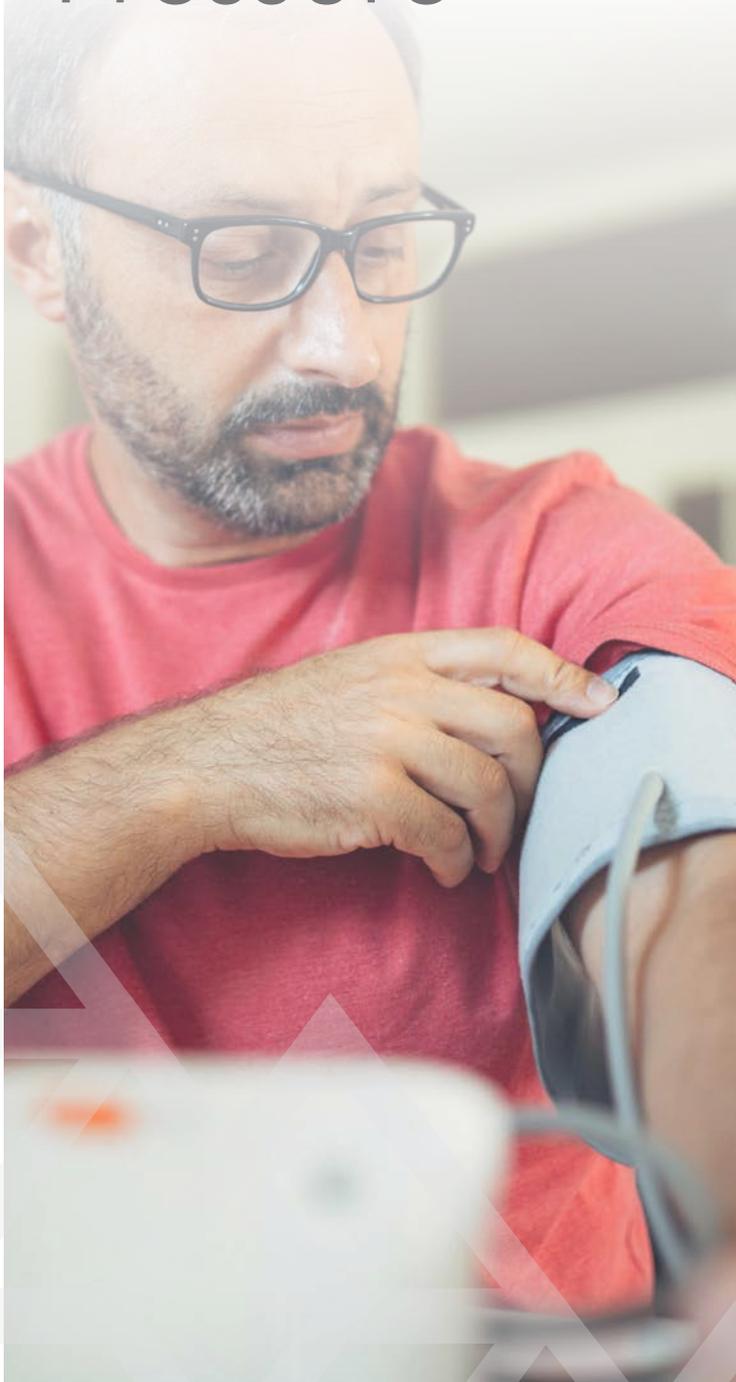
Week 1	Minutes of Activity
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

### Source:

American Heart Association - Physical Activity Improves Quality of Life.

## Week 2:

# Walking for Better Blood Pressure



Walking and other forms of cardiovascular exercise can decrease your blood pressure by 4 to 9 mm Hg. This may not sound like much, but it's as much as some high blood pressure medications.

### *Weekly Challenge:*

Try to accumulate 150 minutes of brisk walking or a similar form of cardiovascular exercise.

Each day you exercise, record the number of minutes under the day of the week. If you are not currently physically active, start slowly and increase your activity over time.

### Record the Number of Minutes You Exercise in Each Day

<i>Week 2</i>	Minutes of Activity
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

### *Sources:*

American Heart Association – Physical Activity Improves Quality of Life [http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/PhysicalActivity/StartWalking/Physical-activity-improves-quality-of-life\\_UCM\\_307977\\_Article.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/PhysicalActivity/StartWalking/Physical-activity-improves-quality-of-life_UCM_307977_Article.jsp)

# Week 3:

## Walking to Reduce Stress



Having a stressful day? Try taking a walk. When we experience stress, our bodies prepare for a “fight or flight” situation by releasing stress hormones that increase our heart rate, breathing rate, perspiration, and other preparations for intense exercise, so your body is ready to move but you may not necessarily be physically active. Over time, this unreleased stress can affect our health. So why not get up and take a quick, brisk walk? Regular exercise is one of the best ways to manage stress, and walking is a great way to get started.

### Weekly Goal:

Try to accumulate 125 minutes of brisk walking or a similar form of cardiovascular exercise.

Each day you exercise, record the number of minutes under the day of the week. If you are not currently physically active, start slowly and increase your activity over time.

### Record the Number of Minutes You Exercise in Each Day

Week 3	Minutes of Activity
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

### Sources:

Stress Management Health Center, Stress Management – Topic Overview by Web MD.

## Week 4:

# Walking for a Healthier, Longer Life



Only a few lifestyle choices have as large an impact on your health as physical activity. People who are physically active for about 7 hours a week have a 40 percent lower risk of dying early than those who are active for less than 30 minutes a week.

Physical activity such as walking can reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and even some cancers. Walk regularly to live longer and add more life to your years.

### *Weekly Challenge:*

Try to accumulate 150 minutes of brisk walking or a similar form of cardiovascular exercise.

Each day you exercise, record the number of minutes under the day of the week. If you are not currently physically active, start slowly and increase your activity over time.

### Record the Number of Minutes You Exercise in Each Day

<i>Week 4</i>	Minutes of Activity
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

### *Source:*

CDC Physical Activity and Health – The Benefits of Physical Activity.