



HEALTHY  
HEART



healthy heart

Unbeatable Ways to Stay Heart-Smart

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## Your Cardiac IQ: Heart Basics

**T**aking good care of your heart becomes second nature when you understand just how this vital organ actually works. Consider the astounding daily commute of your body's red blood cells.

Every day, these tiny cells travel thousands of times around your body, negotiating the twists and turns of your blood vessels. They're on a life-sustaining mission, delivering fresh oxygen to the 300 trillion other cells in the body and carrying away their waste products. Your heart is the amazing pumping machine that makes this fantastic voyage possible. Learn more here about how it works and what can go wrong, and you'll become better at maintaining a healthy heart.

### **WHAT DOES YOUR HEART REALLY DO?**

A muscle the size of your clenched fist, your heart consists of two pumps, side by side. These pumps send your blood zooming through the one-way racecourse of your blood vessels.

The pump on the right side of your heart delivers blood to your lungs, where the red blood cells pick up oxygen. The blood, now rich in oxygen, returns to the left side of your heart, which pumps it out through large arteries to the rest of your body.

These large arteries branch into smaller ones and finally into the capillaries, a network of tiny blood vessels that surround the cells throughout the body. Not until reaching the capillaries do the red blood cells unload their oxygen, which the other cells then use to make energy and do their job.

At the same time, the blood collects carbon dioxide and other waste products from these cells. The blood then travels through larger and larger veins back into the right side of your heart. From there the red blood cells return to the lungs, where they release their carbon dioxide, which is exhaled into the air.

The cycle is complete, only to begin again.

## To keep your heart pumping vigorously — and your blood flowing smoothly ...

- Learn to manage stress.
- Keep your blood pressure under control.
- Eat a low-fat diet.
- Lose any extra weight.
- Stay active with regular workouts.
- If you smoke, quit.

Above all, see your doctor for regular checkups. Tests and screenings help identify any risk factors for heart problems, and your doctor can recommend ways to address them. But much is up to you. Ready? Read on. ♦

## HEART ATTACK! YOUR FIRST MOVES

A heart attack can be years in the making, but when it strikes, every second counts. Quite simply, your heart is calling for help. Blood vessels called the coronary arteries, which supply the heart with oxygen and nutrients, have become clogged with fatty deposits or clots, reducing blood flow to a trickle.

That's when a heart attack can occur. The "starved" heart muscle gets damaged, and without prompt treatment — such as with clot-busting drugs — the damage can progress, permanently weakening the heart or causing death. That's why it's critical to know what to do if you even suspect that you or someone else is having a heart attack.

**KNOW the warning signs.** According to the American Heart Association, they include the following: an uncomfortable pressure, fullness or squeezing sensation in the center of the chest lasting more than a few minutes; pain spreading to the shoulders, neck or arms; or chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

**Remember:** Patients with heart attacks often don't recognize that they're in trouble. They expect to feel pain, and often their only symptoms are pressure or tightness in the chest, or a vague uncomfortable feeling that is often mistaken for indigestion.

**GET help fast.** Call 911 or another emergency medical services number. Don't delay. Half of all heart attack victims wait two hours or longer before seeking treatment. And in those who survive and go on to recover, most of the permanent damage occurs during the first hour.

**TAKE action if necessary.** Begin CPR — cardiopulmonary resuscitation — but only if the victim's breathing or pulse stops while waiting for help and if you're properly trained. Otherwise, it's best to wait for an ambulance to arrive. Emergency personnel can start treatment right away, before arriving at a medical facility, and an ambulance is the fastest way to get treatment. If you have no other choice, drive the victim to the nearest emergency room. But never drive yourself if you think you may be having a heart attack.

## BE prepared.

- Learn which area hospitals have 24-hour emergency cardiac care.
- Know in advance which facility is nearest your home or office. Tell family and friends to call there in an emergency.
- Keep a list of emergency numbers next to the telephone and in your pocket, wallet or purse. ♦

*(Source: American Heart Association)*



## Women Don't Wait

Taking swift action if one suspects a heart attack is doubly important for women, who are twice as likely as men to die

after a heart attack. Women's symptoms are tougher to diagnose once they arrive in the emergency room. Women are also less likely to survive coronary bypass surgery and angioplasty and receive aggressive treatment. So time is of the essence.