

Spotlight on Health

Heart Disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. It causes 1 of every 4 deaths each year.¹ But you can take steps to protect yourself from heart disease and decrease your risk of dying from it. In this newsletter, we'll talk about 2 areas you can focus on: diet and exercise. Making even small changes can help.

Diet

Processed Meat and Unprocessed Red Meat

Scientists know that processed meat increases the risk of dying from heart disease. So they recommend avoiding it. This includes any meat that is salted, cured, smoked, or fermented. It also includes meat that is packaged with chemical preservatives. All types of meat can be processed, including beef, pork, chicken, and fish.

Unprocessed red meat is the red meat that is sold fresh at the store. It can include steak, hamburger, chuck or rump roast, beef brisket, beef ribs, pork loin, pork shoulder, and pork chops. Scientists don't know for sure if unprocessed red meat also increases the risk of dying from heart disease. This is because some studies show increased risk, while others do not.

The Red Meat—Heart Disease Connection

Red meat is high in saturated fat. It's been thought that the high fat content leads to increased cholesterol and heart disease. This is why experts recommend lean red meat instead of high-fat, marbled red meat.

Red meat also contains carnitine. It breaks down into chemicals that can cause plaque to form in the arteries. Carnitine has been linked to increased risk of heart disease. The "redder" the meat, the more carnitine it contains. Thus, some may feel that pork, which is not as red as beef, is more heart healthy. More studies are needed to verify this.

Heart-healthy Diet

The American Heart Association publishes guidelines for a heart-healthy diet. They recommend selecting²:

- A variety of vegetables and fruits
- Whole grains (fiber-rich)
- Dairy products (fat-free or low-fat)
- Poultry and fish (unprocessed)
- Nuts and legumes
- Olive or canola oil

They also recommend avoiding or limiting²:

- Large-sized portions
- Trans fat (partially hydrogenated)



Processed Meats

- Bacon (including turkey bacon, Canadian bacon)
- Hot dogs, corn dogs
- Ham
- Spam
- Sausage
- Corned beef, pastrami
- Beef jerky
- Salami
- Pepperoni
- Luncheon meats such as bologna, ham loaf, pimento loaf
- Chicken nuggets
- Fish sticks

- Saturated fat; replace with mono- and polyunsaturated fats
- Sodas and other high-sugar drinks
- High-salt foods (pickles; olives; many packaged, prepared foods)
- Alcohol

Exercise

A heart-healthy diet alone is not enough to avoid heart disease. Exercise is important too. For some people, exercise is a chore. If that's the way you are, you'll be happy to know that you don't have to be an athlete to benefit. One to 2.4 hours/week of jogging may be enough to minimize the risk of death from heart disease.³ The jogging can be done at a slow pace, which is about 5 miles/hour or 12 minutes/mile. You can spread it out over ≤ 3 days/week. In fact, jogging longer or faster might not give you any more benefit.³

If you don't like to jog, you can do another type of physical activity. Try to find ones you like. There are many options. Remember to include activities to help with balance, flexibility, muscle strength, and endurance. And remember to check with your doctor before you start an exercise program.

Heart-healthy Exercise

These things are part of a comprehensive exercise plan:

- Balance—Activities that promote balance include standing on 1 foot, walking heel to toe, walking in a straight line, yoga, and Tai Chi. You can do these activities anywhere, anytime. Try to work on your balance 2 to 3 days/week.
- Flexibility—Touching your toes, yoga, and Pilates all promote or maintain flexibility. There are also specific stretches for various sports. Try to work on flexibility 2 to 3 days/week.
- Muscle strength—Strength training can be done using the body's resistance (as in pushups), free weights, resistance bands, or machines. The goal is to work each muscle group twice a week, 2 or more days apart.
- Endurance—Aerobic exercise builds endurance. Activities include walking, jogging, running, dancing, swimming, biking, stair climbing, and certain sports. The goal is to do 1 of the following:
 - 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise per week
 - 75 minutes of vigorous intensity exercise per week
 - A combination of moderate and vigorous exercise

Spread out your aerobic exercise over the week. Doing it all in 1 day increases risk of injury. Each session should be at least 10 minutes long. If you want to decrease your blood pressure and/or cholesterol level, aim for 40-minute sessions. These sessions should be moderate or vigorous. Aim to do them 3 to 4 times per week.

Moderate Intensity Activities

- Walking 3 miles/hour or faster on flat terrain
- Bicycling <10 miles/hour
- Playing tennis (doubles)
- Ballroom dancing
- Water aerobics

Vigorous Intensity Activities

- Race walking
- Walking uphill or with a heavy backpack
- Jogging or running
- Bicycling ≥ 10 miles/hour
- Swimming laps
- Playing tennis (singles)
- Aerobic dancing
- Jumping rope

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart disease facts. www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm. Updated August 10, 2015. Accessed November 20, 2015.
2. The American Heart Association's diet and lifestyle recommendations. www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/HealthyEating/The-American-Heart-Associations-Diet-and-Lifestyle-Recommendations_UCM_305855_Article.jsp#. Reviewed August 2015. Accessed November 24, 2015.
3. Schnohr P, O'Keefe JH, Marott JL, et al. Dose of jogging and long-term mortality. The Copenhagen City Heart Study. *J Am Coll Cardiol*. 2015;65:411-419.