

6 Ways to Reduce Your Heart Attack Risk

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Read more: <http://www.livestrong.com/blog/6-ways-reduce-heart-attack-risk#ixzz3SD1kmsU5>

February is *American Heart Month* and to support heart health, the LIVESTRONG.COM blog is publishing a series of heart-focused articles to share strategies on how to protect your health.

Good news: The number of people in the United States who develop heart disease is continuing to fall. The bad news? It's still the No. 2 killer, resulting in approximately 275,000 deaths annually. But you can dramatically decrease your chances of having a heart attack (and other vascular complications like a stroke) simply by knowing and addressing the most important risk factors for heart disease.



1. Stop Smoking

If you smoke, stop. If you can't do it on your own, utilize the many tools -- both behavioral and pharmacologic -- to help you. Quitting smoking is one of the **biggest favors** you can do for your heart. One recent **study** found that not smoking lowers your risk of a heart attack by more than one third.

2. Eat Mediterranean

Again and again, clinical investigators have found that a **Mediterranean diet** lowers your risk of heart disease and overall mortality. The diet is easy and delicious, consisting of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, fish and low-fat dairy products. Key components include nuts, olives, olive oil and red wine in moderation (one to two glasses per day for men, one for women), which have independently been shown to reduce your risk of heart disease. In fact, the positive impact of the Mediterranean diet is almost as great as not smoking.

3. Exercise

It's a no-brainer: Physical exercise will help keep your heart healthy. Set a realistic goal to exercise for half an hour three times a week. It's enough to reap many of the cardiovascular benefits of physical activity. Additional exercise is better to a point, but going overboard with strenuous daily workouts may actually undo some of the benefits, so be careful not to overtrain.

4. Stay Lean

Accumulating fat -- particularly abdominal fat -- is a **big risk factor** for heart disease, so this is another reason to eat right and exercise.

5. Get Social

Psychosocial factors play an important role in limiting your risk of heart disease. Stress, anxiety and depression all increase your risk. Having a strong social support network -- friends, family and colleagues -- lowers your risk.

6. Consider Prescription Medications

If, despite your best efforts at improving your lifestyle, your blood pressure or cholesterol profile is still out of whack, see your health care provider. Medications that lower your blood pressure and your LDL cholesterol (the so-called **"bad" cholesterol**) have been shown to reduce your chances of a heart attack or stroke. Similarly, if you are diabetic and haven't been able to control your blood sugar with lifestyle changes alone, make sure that you and your health care provider are working together to improve your blood sugar control.

The majority of heart attacks and strokes occur in people with at least one risk factor: The more factors you have, the greater your risk. Many of these risk factors are largely under your control. The year is still young -- make a resolution to follow a heart-healthy path, and make an appointment with your health care provider if you need guidance.