



9 Tips to Lower Risk of a Heart Attack or Stroke

Many conditions, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, atrial fibrillation, or diabetes, increase your chance of having a heart attack or stroke. Take action today to lower your chances.

1. **Exercise a little each day.** Moderate exercise lowers your risk of heart attack by 30% to 50%. Aim for 30 minutes of aerobic exercise at least 5 days a week. On the other 2 days, strength train. If it's too much, break it into small chunks, and build up your time. Try a 15-minute walk in the morning and another before lunch.
2. **Set a reasonable goal for weight loss.** If you're overweight or obese, you don't have to get thin to reduce your risk for heart attack and stroke. Losing 5% to 10% of your weight improves cholesterol and lowers your blood pressure and blood sugar.
3. **Take your heart medicine.** One study found that 130,000 Americans die every year because they don't take heart medicines the way their doctor told them. Figure out what keeps you from taking your medicine -- such as side effects, cost, or forgetfulness -- and ask your doctor for help.
4. **Eat well.** Making the effort to follow a healthy diet can lower your risk of heart disease by 24%. Fill your plate with a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and lean meats.
5. **Drink some alcohol, but not too much.** If you're already a drinker, the good news is any type of alcohol helps your heart. Too much alcohol, though, raises your risk of heart attack, stroke, and symptoms from atrial fibrillation. To get the benefit without the risk, limit alcohol to one drink if you're a woman and two if you're a man.
6. **Eat a little chocolate.** Several studies show that people who eat chocolate more than once a week lower their risk of heart disease by almost 40%, of diabetes by about 30%, and of stroke by about 30%. Until researchers determine the amount of chocolate that reduces risk, keep your portions small so you don't gain weight and work your heart harder.
7. **Don't smoke.** Smoking dramatically increases your risk of heart attack and stroke. You don't even have to be the one smoking. Each year, about 46,000 people die from heart disease related to their exposure to second-hand smoke.
8. **Go to the dentist.** Getting your teeth scraped and cleaned every 6 months may lower your risk of heart attack by 24% and of stroke by 13%. A dentist may also spot signs of heart disease -- such as swollen gums or loose teeth -- before you or your doctor notice symptoms, allowing you to get treatment earlier.
9. **Pay attention to your symptoms and tell your doctor.** Don't just hope your symptoms will go away. See your doctor for any unusual symptoms -- such as shortness of breath, changes in heart rhythm, or exhaustion. There's a lot your doctor can do to treat a heart problem -- once you ask for help.

Source: <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/atrial-fibrillation/afib-12/stroke-heart-risk>

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