



# Don't go breakin' my heart!



## Keep your vascular system healthy

Your heart has always been there for you – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. So, isn't it time you started giving your heart and vascular system a little TLC? Your vascular system is your body's network of blood vessels, carrying blood to and from the heart. When these blood vessels become clogged or damaged, your heart, brain and other body parts don't get the blood they need. This can lead to heart attack, stroke and other health problems.<sup>1</sup>

### How is your vascular health?

Heart disease causes one in every three deaths in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Given the numbers, we all need to keep an eye on our heart health. But certain things make you more likely to develop heart disease.<sup>3</sup>

- Not getting enough exercise
- Being overweight
- Health problems that affect the heart and blood vessels, like high blood pressure, diabetes or high cholesterol
- Smoking
- History of heart disease in your family

Talk to your doctor about what you can do to protect your heart and vascular health.

### The good news

You can make yourself healthier and lower your chance of getting heart or vascular disease. Here's how:<sup>4</sup>

- **Stop smoking.** It's not easy, but you're worth the effort. Tobacco products leave sticky plaque in your veins and arteries. They make it more likely you will have vascular problems. You don't have to quit alone. Reach out to friends, family, doctors and support hotline resources for help.
- **Eat a healthy, low-fat diet and keep good cholesterol levels.** Stock your fridge with fresh fruits and veggies, and low-fat or fat-free milk and cheese. Control your serving sizes, and read food labels carefully when shopping to avoid foods high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium or salt.
- **Work out regularly.** This can help you to:
  - Control your weight.
  - Lower your chance of getting heart disease.
  - Raise your chances of living longer. For every hour you spend exercising, you can add another two hours onto your life expectancy.<sup>5</sup>

Making changes to your lifestyle can be tough. But these small changes can make life better for you and your family – by helping you to be there for the big moments.



#### Sources

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- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Million Hearts Initiative website: About Heart Disease & Stroke: Consequences & Costs (accessed March 2015): [millionhearts.hhs.gov/aboutths/cost-consequences.html](http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/aboutths/cost-consequences.html)
- 3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Million Hearts Initiative website: About Heart Disease & Stroke: Risk Factors (accessed March 2015): [millionhearts.hhs.gov/aboutths/risk-factors.html](http://millionhearts.hhs.gov/aboutths/risk-factors.html)
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- 6 Group Health Research Institute website: How Age and Gender Affect Your Heart (accessed March 2015): [ghc.org](http://ghc.org)
- 7 Cleveland Clinic Foundation website: Vascular Disease (accessed March 2015): [my.clevelandclinic.org](http://my.clevelandclinic.org)
- 8 National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website: What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Arteriosclerosis? (accessed March 2015): [nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/arteriosclerosis/signs](http://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/arteriosclerosis/signs)
- 9 <http://www.cancer.gov/news-events/press-releases/2012/PhysicalActivityLifeExpectancy>, accessed 6/2/2015

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## As we get older

You're more likely to have vascular problems as you get older. What happens as you age? Plaque and cholesterol build up in your arteries, thickening and stiffening them — leaving less room for blood to flow. This lower blood flow can lead to a stroke, an aneurysm or a heart attack.<sup>6</sup>

### Know your risk

The most common vascular diseases are:<sup>7,8</sup>

- **Atherosclerosis**, where plaque builds up on the inner walls of the blood vessels. This can cause:
  - Pain or pressure in your chest, shoulders, arms, neck, jaw or back
  - Feeling short of breath
  - Problems with the rhythm of your heart beat
- **Peripheral Arterial Disease**. The arteries outside of your heart become too narrow, and not enough blood can flow through. This can cause:
  - Heart attack
  - Stroke
  - Pain and trouble walking
  - Sores or infections that won't heal
  - Loss of an arm or a leg because of poor circulation
- **Carotid Artery Disease**. The major arteries leading to the brain in the neck become clogged with plaque. This can cause strokes due to the lower blood flow to the brain, or from clots and bits of plaque breaking off and flowing to the brain.
- **Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm**. This happens when the aorta, the largest artery in the body, weakens and begins to bulge. This bulge is called an aneurysm. It may keep getting bigger and rupture if it isn't treated, leading to sudden death.

### Did you know?

For many people, increasing their level of activity, even walking, has a very positive impact on their longevity.<sup>9</sup>

### Helpful resources

To learn more about vascular health, visit the American Heart Association online at [heart.org](http://heart.org). What's your risk? Use their Heart Attack Risk Calculator to find out. Or visit WebMD's Heart Disease Health Center at [webmd.com](http://webmd.com).

Visit [anthem.com/ca](http://anthem.com/ca) for more ways to get healthy — and stay healthy

