Make the Effort to Prevent Heart Disease with Life's Simple 7

More than one in three adults has some form of cardiovascular disease.

The good news is 80 percent of heart disease and stroke can be prevented.

So how do you protect yourself?

Protect yourself from heart disease, the nation's No. 1 killer, with Life's Simple 7® — easy-to-embrace ways to significantly lower your risk of heart disease and improve your health. How simple is it?

Just take a look:

1. **Get Active.** You don't have to join a gym or run in a 5K. Start small by incorporating physical activity into your daily routine more and more: Take the stairs instead of the elevator, park at the farthest end of the parking lot or use your lunch break to take a quick walk. When you're ready, aim for at least 2 ½ hours of moderate physical activity each week. "That's basically taking a 20-minute walk every evening," said V. Seenu Reddy, M.D., a heart and lung surgeon at University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

   Up for a more intense workout? You'll get heart-pumping benefits with at least 75 minutes of vigorous exercise throughout the week. Along with gaining strength and stamina, exercising regularly can lower blood pressure, keep body weight under control and increase your HDL — otherwise known as "good" cholesterol. Exercise also better regulates blood sugar by improving how the body uses insulin. You'll help prevent bone loss, sleep better and feel good. Learn the American Heart Associations Guidelines for Physical Activity in Adults.

2. **Control Cholesterol**. We all have cholesterol, a waxy substance in the bloodstream and in the cells of our body. But despite its reputation, cholesterol it isn't all bad. In fact, it plays an important role in keeping us healthy. But a balance must be struck to prevent too much cholesterol in the blood. There are two types: the "good" kind (HDL) and the "bad" kind (LDL). High levels of bad cholesterol can clog your arteries, increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. This is where good cholesterol comes into play: HDL cleans out that bad cholesterol from the arteries.

   You can produce more of those housekeeping HDLs by exercising regularly and limiting saturated fat, and cholesterol by avoiding too many animal products such as red meats and full-fat dairy, and including healthier fats such as certain vegetable oils. It's also important to limit *trans* fats, too. For some people, diet and lifestyle changes alone aren't enough. Your doctor may prescribe cholesterol-lowering medication to keep your cholesterol levels in check. If you don't know your cholesterol levels, talk to your doctor about scheduling a cholesterol screening.

3. **Eat Better**. Eating the right foods can help you control your weight, blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol. Follow a dietary pattern that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other healthy choices. Penny Kris-Etherton, Ph.D., R.D., a nutritionist at Penn State University who herself uses Life's Simple 7 says, "It's important to choose fruits and vegetables over empty-calorie foods."

   What's a heart-smart diet? Looking for foods stamped with the American Heart Association's Heart-Check mark is one sure way to know you're choosing a food low in saturated fat and cholesterol. Read the full American Heart Association's Recommendations for Diet and Lifestyle.

4. **Manage Blood Pressure**. One in three Americans has high blood pressure — yet one out of every five doesn't even know they have it. That's because high blood pressure, "the silent killer," has no symptoms. Keeping your blood pressure in a healthy range starts with eating a heart-healthy diet. Other important factors are exercising regularly; not smoking; maintaining a healthy weight; limiting salt and alcohol; and taking medication prescribed by your doctor.

5. **Lose Weight**. Extra weight can do serious damage to your heart. Too much fat, especially around the belly, increases your risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. So give your heart a break by dropping the extra pounds — and keeping them off. Every little bit helps. You can shed 24 pounds a year by dropping just 2 pounds a month, and losing as little as 3-5% of your body weight can decrease your heart disease risk. The trick is to increase your aerobic physical activity each week while reducing the calories you take in, to a point where you can achieve energy balance and a healthy weight. Learn more about losing weight.

6. **Reduce Blood Sugar**. Diabetes can quadruple your risk of heart disease or stroke, so keeping blood sugar levels under control is crucial to preventing medical problems involving the heart and kidneys. If left untreated, diabetes can also cause blindness and nerve disease, among other health complications. You can minimize the impact of diabetes on your body — and even prevent or delay the onset of diabetes — by eating right, controlling your weight, exercising and taking medication prescribed your doctor. In some cases, lifestyle changes result in less need for medication.

7. **Stop Smoking**. It's time to kick the habit. Going smoke-free can help prevent not only heart disease and stroke, but also cancer and chronic lung disease. The payoff is almost immediate. Quit smoking and you'll have the same risk level for developing heart disease as non-smokers within only a few years.

What are my risks for getting heart disease?

Ask yourself these 3 questions:

1 How many risk factors do I have?

- age
- gender
- family history

Non-Modifiable
These risk factors cannot be changed.

- high blood cholesterol
- high blood pressure
- physical inactivity
- obesity and overweight
- smoking
- diabetes
- poor diet

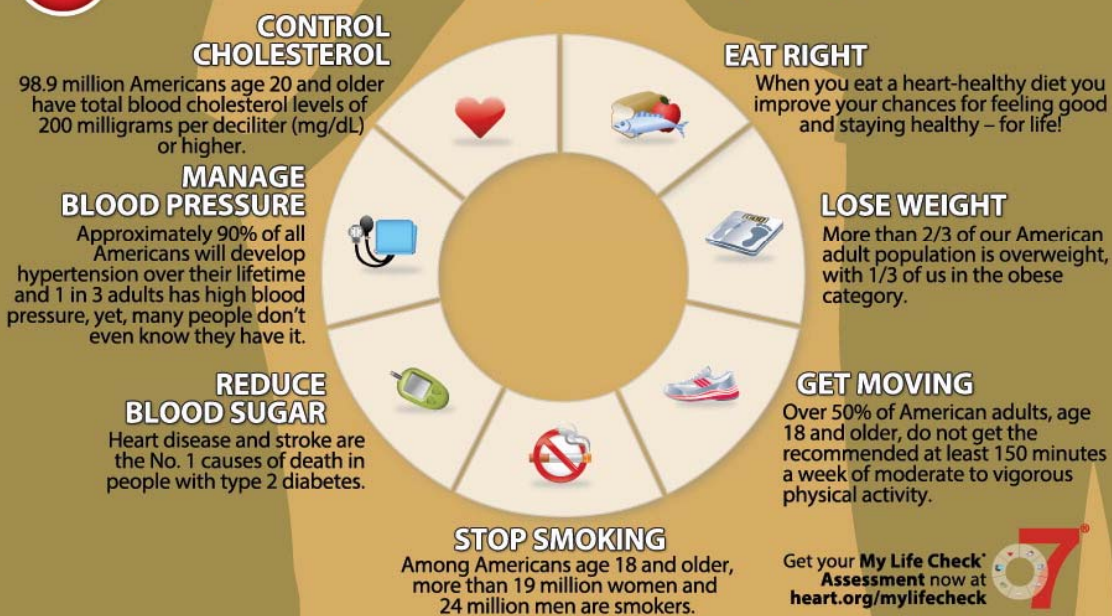**Major risk factors** are those that research has shown significantly increase the risk of heart disease. The more risk factors you have, the greater your chance of developing it.

Modifiable
Any person can make changes to these risk factors, even modest improvements to your health will make a big difference.

2 Do I know Life's Simple 7® keys to prevention?

CONTROL CHOLESTEROL
98.9 million Americans age 20 and older have total blood cholesterol levels of 200 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) or higher.

MANAGE BLOOD PRESSURE
Approximately 90% of all Americans will develop hypertension over their lifetime and 1 in 3 adults has high blood pressure, yet, many people don't even know they have it.

REDUCE BLOOD SUGAR
Heart disease and stroke are the No. 1 causes of death in people with type 2 diabetes.

STOP SMOKING
Among Americans age 18 and older, more than 19 million women and 24 million men are smokers.

EAT RIGHT
When you eat a heart-healthy diet you improve your chances for feeling good and staying healthy – for life!

LOSE WEIGHT
More than 2/3 of our American adult population is overweight, with 1/3 of us in the obese category.

GET MOVING
Over 50% of American adults, age 18 and older, do not get the recommended at least 150 minutes a week of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

Get your **My Life Check** **Assessment** now at **heart.org/mylifecheck**

3 Am I making an effort or making excuses?

Top "barriers" to healthy living from a recent survey of website visitors to heart.org:

14% Costs too much to eat healthy. Think again! Try our tips to save you money and time: heart.org/healthytips

27% I live a heart-healthy lifestyle. Great job! Learn more about preventing heart disease at any age: heart.org/atanyage

18% Don't want to stop eating foods they like. Then DON'T! Just find healthy ways to prepare them here: heart.org/recipes

14% Don't like exercising. Keep trying! Here are our top 5 tips to loving exercise ... or at least not hating it: heart.org/lovingactivity

12% Too busy taking care of others to take care of myself. To do the best for our loved ones, we must make an effort to be in the best possible health ourselves. heart.org/caringforyourself

17% Don't have time to exercise regularly. Don't worry, 10 minutes, 3 times a day is all it takes. heart.org/take10

7% I don't really know how to take care of my heart. You're in luck! We have all the heart-health information you need. heart.org/conditions

American Heart Association | American Stroke Association

Start here: **heart.org/makinganeffort**