



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Strategies for keeping your heart healthy

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Do you know the risk factors that can lead to heart disease, including coronary artery disease and heart attack? Do you know that you can change many of those risk factors?

Admittedly, there are major risk factors that you cannot change. People who have a family history of coronary artery disease are more likely to develop it. Men are more likely to have heart attacks and have them at a younger age than women. In addition, men 45 and older and women 55 and older are more likely to have coronary artery disease. People over age 65 are more likely to die of a heart attack. Older women are twice as likely as older men to die within a few weeks of a heart attack.

Fortunately, there are ways to help keep your heart healthy.

### **Avoid smoking and tobacco use.**

Smoking is one of the most significant risk factors for developing heart disease. No amount of smoking is safe. Chemicals in tobacco damage your heart and blood vessels and nicotine makes your heart work harder. This leads to an increased heart rate and blood pressure. When you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease drops dramatically within just one year

### **Make sure you are active!**

Just 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week can reduce your risk of heart disease. If 30 minutes seems impossible, try to break up the time into 10 minute intervals throughout the day. Still think you can't meet that goal? Well, there is still good news. We now know that even 10 minutes a day can have heart benefits. Gear up to do 60 to 90 minutes of physical activity a week and you may reduce your heart risk by half. So, no excuses, get moving! Take a walk, take the stairs, dance, run. Consistency is the key.

### **Eat a heart healthy diet.**

This isn't about cutting back. It's about adding the better foods for your heart. Start with simple changes. Eat five to 10 servings of vegetables and fruits a day. Start with breakfast and include one fruit or vegetable. Then, snack on vegetables and fruit between meals. For lunch and dinner, make sure half of your plate is filled with vegetables. Take time to discover new vegetables at the grocery. You just might like it!



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## **Maintain a healthy weight.**

In adulthood, your weight gain is mostly fat and not muscle. Being overweight or obese can lead to conditions that increase your risk for heart disease, including hypertension, elevated cholesterol and diabetes. Ask your health care provider if your weight is healthy. If you are not at your ideal weight, work on losing weight. Even a 10 percent reduction in weight can decrease your blood pressure, lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of developing diabetes.

## **Get regular health screenings.**

Without testing, you may not know you are at risk or have already developed heart-related conditions. Regular screening will tell you what your numbers are and what action needs to be taken. Adults should have their blood pressure checked at least every two years. You may need more frequent checks if your numbers are not ideal or if you have other risk factors for heart disease.

Adults should have their cholesterol measured at least once every five years, starting at age 20. You may need more frequent testing if your numbers are not optimal or you have other risk factors for heart disease.

Also, ask your doctor when you should be tested for diabetes.

## **Avoid stress.**

Stress can be avoided and, even when inevitable, it can be controlled. When you are stressed, you are less likely to adhere to heart healthy practices. Simple stress reducers include spending time with family and friends, thinking positive, getting enough sleep, exercising and practicing relaxation techniques.

## **Get enough sleep.**

Finally, try to get eight hours of good sleep. Yes, it can be a challenge, but eight hours is a good number to achieve.

Take control! Start your heart healthy strategies today!