

Six Heart-Healthy Tips Every Adult Should Follow To Help Avoid Heart Disease From OSF

by Randy Schorfheide
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ALTON - Since 1964, February has been recognized as American Heart Month thanks in part to the first official proclamation from President Lyndon B. Johnson. Therefore, during the past 59 years, the month of February has been a time when the nation spotlights heart disease.

It's estimated that more than 600,000 Americans die from heart disease every year. Recognized as the number one cause of deaths for most groups, heart disease affects all ages, genders, and ethnicities. Risk factors include high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, and excessive alcohol use.

The human heart is responsible for pumping blood throughout the body, supplying oxygen and nutrients and removing toxins and waste. Weighing between 8 and 12 ounces, the heart is a powerful organ comprised of four chambers that work together to pump blood in and out. The heart gets oxygenated blood from the lungs and pumps it throughout the rest of the body. It does this by contracting at a rhythmic pace, about 60-80 times per minute.

Heart disease occurs when the arteries leading to the heart become clogged. Although heart disease has been around for thousands of years, we do know that many aspects of modern life exacerbate risk factors and make people more prone to heart disease and heart failure. Today, one in four deaths in the U.S. is attributable to heart disease. Heart disease can affect everyone, but taking stock of your prior health risks, activities and diet can help you reduce your risk.

Every adult can show their heart some love by honestly assessing their own heart health, lifestyle, and genetic risk factors and then making decisions in collaboration with a physician to lead a heart-healthy life moving forward. In most cases, heart disease is preventable by doing the following:

1. Quit Smoking.

If you are a smoker, the number one thing you can do to improve your heart health is quitting smoking. Cigarette smoking is the number one cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S. The over 7,000 toxic chemicals in cigarette smoke can damage your body's ability to deliver oxygen-rich blood to your heart.

2. Get Active.

Even individuals with heart disease risk factors benefit from regular activity. Those who stay active lower their risk of early death compared to those who lead sedentary lifestyles. Strengthen your heart by getting at least 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise three to five days a week. Before you start a new fitness routine or make any dramatic changes to your existing habits, talk to your doctor to ensure you choose activities appropriate for your current level of health and cardiovascular capabilities.

3. Get Enough Sleep.

Adults who sleep less than seven hours each night are more likely to present with such health problems as heart attack, asthma, and depression. Unfortunately, about a third of American adults say they get less than seven hours of sleep per night. Some common reasons people struggle to get enough sleep may include stress, caffeine intake, an inconsistent sleep schedule, or too much time late at night on an electronic device like a smartphone, laptop, or television. If you need help adjusting your sleep schedule and improving your sleep quality, talk to your doctor (and know that regular exercise and quitting smoking can help too).

4. Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet.

A diet high in fat can increase your risk of developing a dangerous heart disease. When fatty deposits in the blood build up over time, they narrow the arteries in the heart, resulting in a condition called atherosclerosis, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke. Fuel your heart with lean proteins, healthy grains, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Reduce your intake of sugary processed beverages and foods, salty, fried foods, and fast food high in saturated fats. Add to your diet such superfoods as lean meat and fish, oatmeal that's high in fiber, blueberries, leafy greens, and healthy nuts like almonds.

5. Reduce Stress.

Researchers believe that stress may affect lifestyle behaviors and health factors that increase your risk of heart disease risk, including smoking, inactivity, unhealthy diet choices, and high blood pressure and cholesterol. While many aspects of your life—from work to family to social pressures—may be causing you stress, every effort you can make to lead an emotionally healthy, balanced lifestyle can improve your heart health and happiness. If you worry that stress could be negatively impacting your emotional and physical health, talk to your doctor and ask for a referral to a mental health professional.

6. Have Regular Wellness Exams.

The best asset in your quest for optimal heart health is your doctor. Make sure you are following age and risk factor appropriate recommendations for regular health screenings with your doctor.



Sridhar Sampath Kumar, MD, a board-certified physician specializing in interventional cardiology and cardiovascular disease with OSF Medical Group-Cardiology in Alton, is available to Riverbend area residents and *empowers his patients to be responsible for their health and work with them to come up with a plan they are comfortable with.* “Cardiology is exciting for me,” he said. “I want my patients to understand all options and know that the journey we take to formulate that plan is key to a successful outcome.”

More information about Dr. Kumar is available by visiting www.osfhealthcare.org/saint-anthonys or calling (618) 474-6277.

About OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony's Health Center

A 49-bed Rural Health designated acute care hospital in Alton, Illinois, [OSF Saint Anthony's](http://www.osfhealthcare.org/saint-anthonys) serves the residents of Madison, Jersey and Macoupin counties. It is home to OSF Moeller Cancer Center, which provides the latest diagnostic tools and treatment for patients in a relaxing environment. OSF Saint Anthony's also provides 24-hour access to a physician-staffed emergency department, in addition to cardiovascular, neurology, pulmonology, surgical, rehabilitation services and more. OSF Saint Anthony's is fully accredited by the Joint Commission for Healthcare Facilities, American College of Surgeons' Commission on Cancer, American College of Radiology, CMS 4-Star Rating, American Heart Association, IDPH and TJC Primary Stroke Center. OSF Saint Anthony's is part of OSF HealthCare – an integrated health system with 15 hospitals in Illinois and Michigan and robust Innovation and Digital Health divisions that provide access to specialty care and remote monitoring, helping people receive the care they need close to home. [OSF HealthCare](http://www.osfhealthcare.org) is operated by The Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis.