

# The Older Adult's Guide to a Healthy Heart

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keeps his heart strong P.2

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in 60 seconds P.3

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you've got to try P.6

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**PLUS:** The easiest (and cheapest) way  
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# 5 Heart-Health Lessons a Cardiologist Wants You to Know

Don't smoke, eat right and exercise regularly: You don't need to be a cardiologist to know that these measures can help protect your heart. There's more to learn about the subject of heart health, though. Here are five lesser-known things a heart doctor wishes his patients understood.



## 1. A Plant-Based Diet Doesn't Have to Be Meat-Free

Research shows that a plant-based diet is best for your heart health. But did you know you can get all the benefits without going vegetarian? "A little bit of meat is fine," says Samir Aziz, M.D., a clinical professor of cardiovascular surgery at Howard University and George Washington University. Load up on vegetables, legumes, and whole grains most of the time, and you can still enjoy the occasional burger.



## 2. Self-Care Matters More Than You Think

You can prevent stress from having a negative effect on your heart health. Angst itself isn't the real danger — letting it go unchecked is. That's when stress drives the inflammation that can contribute to heart disease. "It's how you react that's important," says Dr. Aziz. He suggests exercise, yoga, meditation and laughter as ways to unwind.



## 3. Cholesterol Isn't All Bad

Your total cholesterol number doesn't tell the whole story. What's more important than keeping your LDL (bad) number down is keeping your HDL (good) number up. The reason? "Because that's protective," he says. Your levels should be considered in context with your other risk factors, so talk to your doctor about what's right for you.



## 4. Lifestyle Changes Work

Lifestyle changes and medications may be just as effective as stents or other surgical approaches, according to a 2020 study from the American College of Cardiology. "Don't smoke, get your weight down, eat better and take a statin drug if you need it to lower your cholesterol. You can avoid surgery or stents and continue to live well," Dr. Aziz says.



## 5. No Two Heart-Health Plans Are the Same

Each of us has our own risk factors. Diabetes, a family history of heart disease, untreated sleep apnea and poor sleep in general are a few to keep in mind. Having a firm grasp of your risks can help you and your doctor land on a plan to keep your heart in tip-top shape, says Dr. Aziz.





# The 60-Second Health Check

Here are two speedy ways you can get a snapshot of your heart health. Pair these two quick tests with regular doctor visits to have your blood pressure evaluated, along with your cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

## RESTING HEART RATE

The best time to check your resting heart rate is first thing in the morning, before you get out of bed.

**Here's how:** Find your pulse by putting your finger on the inside of your wrist or on your neck. Count the number of beats in 30 seconds and double it.

### SAMPLE RESTING HEART RATE CHECK

$$40 \times 2 = 80$$

BEATS PER MINUTE (BPM)

### NORMAL RESTING RATE

**60–100**

BPM

### IDEAL RESTING RATE

**50–70**

BPM

## RECOVERY AFTER EXERCISE

Got another minute? Take your pulse for 15 seconds after a workout, and multiply by 4. Repeat in one minute. Within 60 seconds of stopping your workout, your heart rate should drop by 25 to 35 bpm.

### SAMPLE RECOVERY HEART RATE CHECK

$$25 \times 4 = 100$$

BPM

### SAMPLE IDEAL RECOVERY HEART RATE

**65–75**

BPM (25-35 BPM DROPS IN 60 SECONDS)



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# Do You Know These Important Numbers?



The results of these four screening tests can kick-start or reinforce good habits. If they're out of range, bringing them to healthy levels might help prevent a heart attack or stroke.

## Blood Pressure

High blood pressure puts you at a greater risk of heart disease and stroke, notes the American Heart Association. Getting more exercise and sleep can help lower it.

**NORMAL BLOOD PRESSURE**

**120/80**  
OR LOWER

## Cholesterol Levels

Three types of fat in the blood impact the heart: High triglycerides plus either high LDL (bad) cholesterol or too-low HDL (good) can lead to blocked arteries. Medicine and lifestyle changes can help.

**HDL**



**HIGH = GOOD**

**LDL**



**LOW = GOOD**

## Waist Size

The American Heart Association reports that waist size is a better predictor of heart attacks than BMI. Measure just above your hip bones. Aim to keep your numbers below:

**MEN**

**40**  
INCHES

**WOMEN**

**35**  
INCHES

## Body Mass Index

Your BMI is an estimate of your body fat based on your height and weight.

It's not a perfect measurement: Doctors use it to help determine if you're at a healthy weight.

**NORMAL BMI**

**18-24**  
CALCULATE YOURS  
AT [CDC.GOV](https://www.cdc.gov)





# 4 Easy Ways to Help Your Heart Today

Strengthening your heart doesn't require big lifestyle changes. These little adjustments can really add up.

**1 Have a Bean Burrito for Lunch**  
Enjoying a meat-free meal once or twice a week is a simple way to help lower your cholesterol, according to the American Heart Association.

**2 Take a Dance Break**  
Or do some other kind of physical activity for 30 minutes. If dancing's not your thing, try walking, swimming or going for a bike ride — whatever you'll look forward to.

**3 Start a Food Journal**  
Registered dietitians say putting pen to paper after each meal can help you make good diet choices. Even better, it can help you pinpoint triggers that spawn cravings.

**4 Commit to Quit**  
If you smoke, the best thing you can do for your health is quit. Reach out to your doctor for smoking cessation resources. Or check out [smokefree.gov](https://smokefree.gov) for more tools to help you quit.

# A Day on DASH

This heart-smart eating plan helps curb high blood pressure and keep the number on your scale in check. Best of all, there are no forbidden food groups and it's a cinch to follow.



Doctors recommend the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet for one reason: It works. Research shows that the DASH diet can help bring down blood pressure and cholesterol alike. It's also a proven diet for weight loss and reducing your risk of diabetes.

To follow it, just focus on adding vegetables or fruit to every meal or snack. Also, aim for six servings of whole

grains a day. Finally, switch to low-fat dairy and choose small portions of lean protein.

Sound doable? Here are some ideas for what your meals and snacks will look like on a typical day on the DASH diet.

## BREAKFAST

- Oatmeal with fresh fruit.
- Hard-boiled eggs with whole-wheat toast.
- High-fiber breakfast cereal with low-fat milk.

## LUNCH

- Main dish salad with a lean protein such as roast chicken or turkey and a sprinkling of nuts for some healthy fat. Pick shredded cabbage or baby spinach for a more nutrient-dense salad than one that starts with iceberg.
- Sandwich made with lean meat on whole-grain bread.

## DINNER

- Grilled or baked salmon with a side of roasted vegetables.
- Chickpea curry made with canned beans and brown rice.
- Whole-grain pasta in marinara sauce, with a salad.

## SNACKS

- Fresh berries with plain, low-fat Greek yogurt.
- Vegetables cut into sticks and enjoyed with a dip like guacamole or hummus.
- A small handful of unsalted nuts paired with apple or orange slices for sweetness.

## DESSERTS

- Sweets are 100% allowed on the DASH diet, but guidelines suggest limiting treats to two to four times per week.