

# SIX STEPS TO A HEALTHIER HEART

Tobacco smoke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, physical inactivity, obesity and diabetes all increase your risk of heart attack. To decrease your risk...

## 1. DON'T SMOKE CIGARETTES OR OTHER TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Avoiding tobacco smoke is the best thing you can do to maintain your health. Also, constant exposure to other people's smoke increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. If you smoke, get help to quit. As soon as you stop smoking, your risk of heart disease and stroke starts to drop. In time, your risk will be about the same as if you'd never smoked.

## 2. HAVE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE CHECKED REGULARLY

You have high blood pressure if two or more of your readings are 140/99 mm Hg or higher. High blood pressure makes your heart work harder. That puts more strain on the heart and arteries. If your blood pressure is normal, have it checked at least once a year. If not, follow your doctor's advice to control it. Your doctor may put you on medication. You may need to eat more fruits and vegetables along with nonfat dairy products. You may also need to lose weight, be more active and reduce salt (sodium) intake.



3. **READ LABELS TO MAKE SURE YOU EAT FOODS LOW IN SATURATED FATS AND CHOLESTEROL**  
Limit your saturated fat intake to 8-10 percent of total calories or less. Cholesterol is a natural substance found in animal tissues. Too much of it builds up in your arteries because of a diet in high saturated fat and cholesterol or hereditary factors. Get your cholesterol level checked by a healthcare professional once a year. If your total cholesterol level is 240 milligrams per deciliter (6.2 mmol/l) or higher, it's too high. Levels of 200-239 (5.1-6.1 mmol/l) are borderline high-risk. If your level is high, you'll need it checked more often. You can lower it by changes in your diet, exercise, weight loss and/or drug therapy.

## 4. STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Thirty (30) to sixty (60) minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days of the week is all it takes to help your heart. Vigorous activities include brisk walking, jogging, running, rowing, swimming, soccer, tennis and basketball. Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program if you're middle-aged or older, have not been physically active and



plan a relatively vigorous exercise program. But you don't have to be an athlete to lower your risk. Moderate activities such as walking, gardening, housework and dancing for 30-60 minutes on most days can help your heart. If you haven't been active, start with 10 minutes, then work up to more.

## 5. MAINTAIN PROPER WEIGHT

If you have too much fat, especially in the waist, you have a higher risk for health problems. These include heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes. A high-risk waistline is 35 inches or more for women and 40 inches or more for men. Obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 30.0 or greater, or about 30 pounds or more overweight. Follow a balanced, nutritious diet as you reduce your weight. Watch your calories as well as the amount of fat and cholesterol you eat.

## 6. HAVE REGULAR MEDICAL CHECKUPS

If you have diabetes or other medical problems, follow your doctor's advice to reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.

### What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease happens when the walls of your coronary arteries gradually become 'furred up' with fatty deposits called **atheroma**. If the arteries become too narrow, the blood and oxygen supply to your heart can be restricted. This can lead to pain or discomfort known as angina, which is often brought on by physical activity. If the atheroma becomes unstable, it may break off and lead to a blood clot forming. If the blood clot blocks the coronary artery, the heart muscle is starved of blood and oxygen and may become permanently damaged. This is known as a heart attack. A heart attack can be life threatening, so if you ever think you are having a heart attack, **call 511 immediately**.

## HOW YOUR HEART WORKS

The heart is a muscle that pumps blood around the body. It is about the size of your fist and is in the middle of your chest and tilted slightly to the left. The heart pumps blood and oxygen to the tissues and carries away unwanted carbon dioxide and other waste products. The blood circulates around the body through a system of blood vessels.

The heart has four chambers – two on the left side and two on the right. The two upper chambers are called the **atria**, and the two lower chambers are called the **ventricles**. The two sides of the heart are divided by a muscular wall called the **septum**. Each side of the heart has a ‘one-way valve system’, which means that the blood travels only in one direction through the heart. The right side of the heart receives de-oxygenated blood from the body. The blood is pumped through the **pulmonary artery** to the lungs where it picks up a fresh supply of oxygen. The left side of the heart receives oxygenated blood from the lungs and pumps this through the **aorta** into the arteries which supply the rest of the body.

Like every other living tissue the heart muscle (**myocardium**) needs to be continuously supplied with oxygenated blood. This supply of blood comes from the **coronary arteries** which start from the beginning of the aorta. After supplying the myocardium the blood drains back into the **coronary veins**.



*The differences between a normal human heart and one enlarged by alcoholism and high blood pressure. Covered in scar tissue, the enlarged organ is nearly twice the normal size. Such alcoholic cardiomyopathy weakens the heart so that it is unable to pump blood adequately.*

## HEART ATTACK WARNING SIGNS

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Here are some of the signs that can mean a heart attack is happening.

- ♥ **CHEST DISCOMFORT.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the centre of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- ♥ **DISCOMFORT IN OTHER AREAS OF THE UPPER BODY.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- ♥ **SHORTNESS OF BREATH.** This feeling often comes along with chest discomfort. But it can occur before the chest discomfort.
- ♥ **OTHER SIGNS.** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

If you or someone you're with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs **CALL 5-1-1** and **Get to a hospital right away!**



## Six Steps To A Healthy Heart

CERTIFIED BY:



#3 Railway View, Ladymeade Gardens,  
Jemmotts Lane, St Michael,  
Barbados BBI 1156  
Tel: (246) 437-3312. Fax: (246) 430-9898  
Email: [enquiries@hsfbarbados.org](mailto:enquiries@hsfbarbados.org)  
Website: [www.hsfbarbados.org](http://www.hsfbarbados.org)