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7 Ways to cut your risk of heart disease

know your risks

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Vanessa Sands



Year after year, heart disease remains the No. 1 killer of women in the US, eclipsing other threats such as cancer. And while you can't change a genetic or racial predisposition to heart disease, there are far more risk factors over which you can exercise (pun intended) control. Here are just a few ways to cut down your risk for heart disease.





How to cut down your heart disease risk factors:

...you know you can't do it. But is it even worth stopping at this point? According to Teresa Caulin-Glaser, MD, PhD, FAHA, director of McConnell Heart Health Center in Columbus, Ohio, the answer is an unqualified "yes!" She says, "The good news is that, if you stop smoking, your risk for heart disease will decrease to that of a woman who has never smoked in two to three years after you stop."

2. Reduce your blood pressure.

Your risk of dying from a heart attack is 10 times greater if you have hypertension. But even if you are obese, stressed, have a family history, or are 60 or older -- which makes you particularly vulnerable -- you can reduce your blood pressure significantly through improving your diet, losing weight and getting more exercise.

3. Exercise.

Your heart is a muscle, and like other muscles, will weaken and shrink if not worked out. According to the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of High Blood Pressure, you can reduce your blood pressure by 13/9 mm/Hg just by exercising 30 to 45 minutes most days of the week. Exercise also stimulates the production of feel-good chemicals in your brain, reducing the stress that is yet another risk factor.

4. Get your sugar under control.

Medical professionals point out that diabetes poses a higher risk to cardiovascular health in women than in men. And Type 2 diabetes -- even in the face of a family history -- is now regarded as largely preventable. How? Through eating well (see item #5), regular exercise and getting down to a healthy weight.

5. Eat well.

As a woman, you may not have been right about diet -- but your great great grandmother probably was because she lived closer to nature, where the best food for you comes from. A heart-healthy menu includes lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, fish, nuts... and very little in the way of "the

