

FITNESS FOCUS

HEALTHY HEART FACTS FOR AMERICAN HEART MONTH

Did you know that February is American Heart Month? (Not because of Valentine's Day.) Every year since its congressional approval in 1963, the President has issued a proclamation to this effect to help raise public awareness of heart disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability. Almost 700,000 people die of heart disease in the United States annually. That is about 29% of all U.S. deaths. Heart disease is a term that includes several specific heart conditions. The most common is coronary heart disease, which often appears as a heart attack. The chance of developing coronary heart disease can be reduced by taking steps to prevent and control factors that put people at greater risk. Here are some things you can do to help your heart:

- Limit your intake of fat.
- Choose heart-healthy fats such as Olive Oil over saturated fats and trans fats.
- Limit your intake of sugars.
- Limit your intake of sodium/salt.
- Choose more whole grains, legumes, fresh produce and low fat dairy products.
- Choose lean meat and poultry.
- Include fish in your diet.
- Utilize portion control.
- Become physically active for 30 to 60 minutes a day.
- Stop smoking.
- Limit your intake of alcohol.

Risk Factors:

- People who **smoke** are six times as likely to have a heart attack than those who don't smoke, according to the American Heart Association (AHA). Luckily, you can reverse the damaging effects if you quit smoking now.
- The higher your **blood cholesterol**, the greater your chances are of developing heart disease. Blood cholesterol is affected by the foods you eat and the amount of exercise you get. Unfortunately, it can also be affected by genetics and race. Even thin people can have high cholesterol. You should have this checked annually.
- **High blood pressure** also contributes to an increased risk of heart disease. High blood pressure can also be hereditary, but can be regulated with medication.
- **Lack of exercise and obesity** are also risk factors. The solution? Exercise more and eat wisely.

According to the AHA, 80% of people with **diabetes** die from heart and blood-vessel diseases. People with diabetes should work to regulate their blood sugar through their diet and exercise.

NOTE: As with any exercise program, start out slowly and increase your duration and intensity gradually. Talk to your physician about other lifestyle modifications that may help to lower your risk factors even more.