



## Five Ways to Reduce Your Risk of Heart Disease and Stroke

Every year, more women than men die of heart disease and stroke, according to the American Heart Association (AHA). The overall lifetime risk of dying from breast cancer is about 4 percent, but for cardiovascular disease or stroke, it's nearly 50 percent.

But here's the good news: You are in charge of your own destiny, especially if you start making these lifestyle changes that can reduce your risk.

**Here are five ways you can** dodge the cardiovascular-disease bullet:

**1. Don't Smoke.** The toxins inhaled from cigarette smoke can shrink coronary arteries. As a result, blood doesn't circulate as well through the heart muscle (a precursor to heart attack). Also in smokers, blood vessel linings become stickier and thus more prone to clotting, which can pave the way for stroke. The bottom line: If you smoke, find a way to quit for good. The AHA's 2007 guidelines recommend counseling, nicotine replacement or other forms of smoking cessation therapy.

**2. Keep Your Weight in Check.** By bringing your weight to its optimal level you will help lower your cholesterol level and your blood pressure - two major risk factors for heart disease. If you need to lose weight or sustain weight loss, the AHA recommends a minimum of 60-90 minutes of moderate activity, such as a brisk walk, on most if not all days of the week.

**3. Exercise Your Options.** Thirty minutes of moderate physical activity daily can reduce your risk of heart disease by raising blood levels of the 'good' cholesterol (HDL) that carries cholesterol away from the arteries and back to the liver where it can be passed from the body. The same intensity of exercise can also reduce your LDL cholesterol or "bad" artery-clogging cholesterol.

**4. Limit the Fat in Your Diet** from saturated sources, such as butter and other animal fats to less than 7 percent of total caloric intake per day. Replace those fats with heart-healthy cholesterol-busting choices like olive and canola oil, fish, seeds and nuts. Avoid trans fats completely, if possible. And use all fats sparingly -- no more than 20 to 30 percent of your total caloric intake per day. A little goes a long way.

**5. Fiber Up.** Whole grains, such as oatmeal and whole-grain bread, are excellent sources of vitamins and soluble fiber, which have been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol. There has been abundant scientific evidence in recent years showing that people who consume more whole grains have a lower risk for heart disease.