



Know your numbers

We live our lives by numbers. We know our bank PIN number, our social security number, and many others to get through our personal lives. It is also important to know your heart health numbers. High cholesterol, high blood pressure, and high body mass index (BMI) are risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Elevated numbers often have no warning signs, so it's a good idea to get your numbers checked regularly.

Talk to your primary care provider about your risk factors. They may look at the measurements below:

Blood Pressure

High blood pressure raises the risk of heart attack and stroke. You can maintain a healthy blood pressure by limiting salt, eating healthy, exercising, and by working with your healthcare provider on possible treatments.

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is important for making hormones, vitamin D, and more. But the excess cholesterol in your blood can combine with other substances to form plaque. Plaque can build up in the walls of your arteries and lead to coronary artery disease, heart attack, or stroke.

Blood Glucose

A blood glucose test measures the amount of sugar in the blood. These numbers help diagnose and monitor diabetes. Diabetes is another risk factor for heart problems.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI is an estimate of body fat and a good gauge of your risk for diseases that can occur with more body fat. It is calculated from your height and weight. It indicates whether you are at a healthy weight, overweight, or obese. The higher your BMI, the higher your risk for a variety of health problems.

Consider scheduling an annual physical with your primary care provider. Checking your numbers each year is a great way to be proactive about your health.

Source: NIH.gov, Heart.org



Simple food tweaks for a heart-healthy diet



Fats: Use half the amount of butter, shortening, or oil in the recipe, and replace the other half with unsweetened applesauce, mashed banana, or prune purée.



Sugar: Reduce the amount of sugar by one third or one half. Make up for less sugar by adding spices like cinnamon, cloves, allspice, or nutmeg. Vanilla extract or almond flavoring can enhance sweetness as well.



Meats: Replace ground beef with a leaner meat, such as ground turkey.



Starches: Instead of using white pasta or white flour, use whole wheat pasta or whole wheat flour. And whole wheat pastry flour works well in quick breads.



Cooking Methods: Stop frying in oil or butter. Try baking, broiling, or poaching instead.

Heart Health

The dangers of energy drinks

Before you reach for an energy drink the next time you are looking for extra pep in your step, read the label. Many energy-boosting beverages contain massive amounts of sugar, and most are not regulated by the FDA. They could include proprietary blends of herbs and supplements in undisclosed amounts. One energy drink could contain the same amount of caffeine as five cups of coffee. That is a whopping dose of caffeine and could have severe consequences to your health.

Most energy drinks list 100–300 milligrams of caffeine per serving, although those amounts may not be 100 percent accurate. Keep in mind that one can or bottle may contain more than one serving. It's also easy to lose count of caffeine consumption when you may have already consumed caffeine in other beverages. Up to 400 milligrams of caffeine per day is considered safe for most adults. Excessive caffeine intake can cause heart palpitations, tremors, panic attacks, and anxiety.

Caffeine isn't the only concern. Energy drinks contain other stimulants that can impact your heart health. Drinking just one energy drink can narrow your arteries. These popular drinks may also raise your blood pressure and heart rate, which can greatly increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. This is especially dangerous for those with underlying health issues.



Here are some healthier ways to recharge your batteries:

Get plenty of sleep. Try to get enough sleep whenever possible, so you don't become fatigued or sleepy during the day.

Drink lots of water. Being dehydrated can make you tired. Be sure to drink water throughout the day.

Exercise. Regular workouts or walks can raise your energy levels and keep you alert.

Lower your stress. Feeling stressed drains your battery. Try yoga, meditation, or spending quality time with friends and family to calm your mind and raise your spirits.

Source: Heart.org, MayoClinic.org, NIH.gov, ClevelandClinic.org

Additional resources

Watch this [video](#) to learn seven amazing facts about your heart.

[Adding color to your diet with fruits and vegetables](#) is the first step to heart-healthy eating.

Learn how to [gauge your exercise intensity](#) using your heart rate.

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Be kind, be healthy challenge

Showing kindness can lead to feelings of happiness and well-being, and it is linked with lower blood pressure. Perform one small act of kindness each day this month. Use the list below for ideas.

- Find an opportunity to compliment someone.
- Write someone a kind note.
- Say hello and smile at someone.
- Surprise someone with a cup of coffee.
- Donate your gently used clothes.
- Volunteer at a local shelter or charity.
- Give up your seat to someone who is standing.
- Be kind to yourself!

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