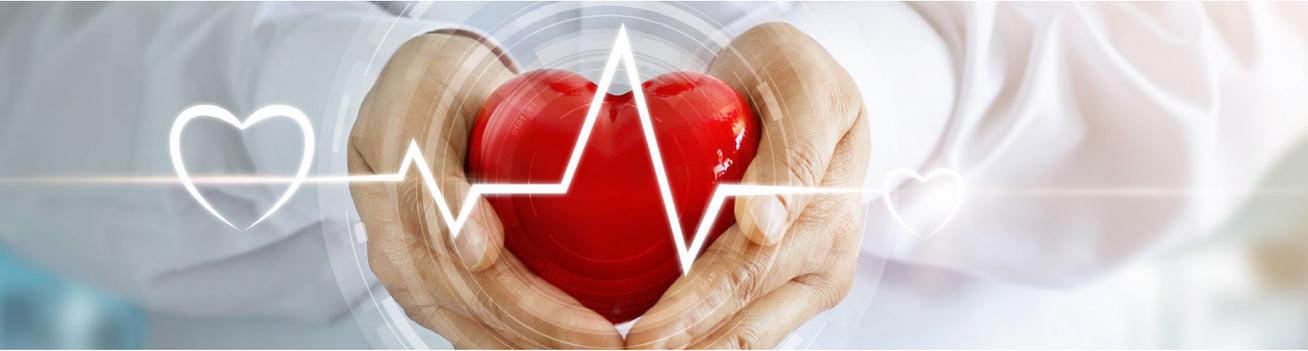# Improve your heart health

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Do you take your heart for granted? Heart disease is the number one killer of women and men in the United States. The three major risk factors for heart disease are well known: smoking, high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. Other risk factors include diabetes, obesity and physical inactivity. Researchers are now hunting for genes that may be risk factors for heart disease. But you can take steps **_now_** to lower your risk.

Get Tested: Early heart disease may not cause any symptoms. That's why regular checkups with your doctor are so important. Blood pressure and cholesterol levels can also provide early signs. Although early heart disease might not cause any obvious symptoms, advanced heart disease may cause chest pressure, shortness of breath or fatigue. Some people may feel lightheaded, dizzy or confused. Tell your doctor if you're experiencing any symptoms.

Make Healthy Choices: Talk with your doctor about what you can do to keep your heart healthy. Following a heart-healthy eating plan is important for everyone. If you have high blood pressure, you may want to follow the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet. This diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole-grain foods and low-fat dairy products. To learn more about the diet, see www.nhlbi. nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/dash.

Get Help: For some people, having a heart attack is the first sign of heart disease. Pain or discomfort in your chest or upper body, a cold sweat or shortness of breath are all signs of a heart attack. If you feel any of these signs, get medical help right away. Acting fast can save your life and prevent permanent damage. Regular checkups help ensure that a doctor will check your heart for problems. Be good to your heart. Don't take it for granted. Get tested for heart disease and follow your doctor's suggestions.

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