



FEBRUARY 2022

# Wellness Matters

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Good Health

## Reduce Your Heart Stress

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. In fact, half of all Americans are currently considered “at risk” for heart disease, and that figure continues to rise. Due to the prevalence of the disease, February is recognized as *American Heart Month* to raise awareness about heart disease and prevention. To celebrate, you can focus on dialing down your stress level.

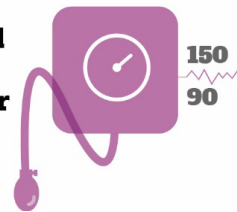
**Stress and Heart Health** While there are risk factors that contribute to heart disease that you can’t control, there are many things you can do to maintain your heart health. One of those things is to reduce your stress. Having too much stress for too long is bad for your heart. Some people may handle stress with poor health behaviors—such as smoking, eating unhealthy foods, and drinking alcohol. Such behaviors

increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

### Take Charge of Your Stress

Managing stress is good for your

**Chronic stress may lead to high blood pressure, which can increase your risk for heart attack and stroke.**



Overall health and well-being. Taking steps to reduce your stress will improve your overall health. Try these tips:

- **Simplify your schedule.** If you’re feeling rushed or too busy, prioritize essential items on your calendar and to-do lists.
- **Practice relaxation techniques.** Try listening to relaxing music to help you calm down or look into stress management or relaxation classes.
- **Get enough sleep.** Adults should strive for seven to nine hours of quality sleep each night.

- **Exercise regularly.**

Movement can get your blood and endorphins flowing, relieving stress, anxiety, and depression.

- **Maintain social**

**connections.** It’s important to make time for friends and family and talk with people you trust.

In the United States, one in four deaths are the result of heart disease. Risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, inactivity, smoking, and obesity.



If the stresses in your life become more than you can bear or manage with these techniques, consider seeking professional assistance.

## Should You Take Aspirin for Your Heart?

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel of 16 experts, recently changed its guidance on aspirin use, stating that most adults do not need to take aspirin to prevent first heart attacks or strokes. This change to a long-standing recommendation is based on new evidence that the potential harms of aspirin—including major bleeding—cancel out the benefits.

Here's an overview of the new guidance:

- 1) Adults ages 40 to 59 who are at a higher risk for cardiovascular disease but don't have a history of it should decide with their health care provider if they should start taking aspirin.
- 2) Adults 60 years and older shouldn't start taking aspirin to prevent heart disease and stroke.
- 3) Adults who are already taking aspirin for a previous heart attack or stroke should continue to do so unless told otherwise by their clinician.



According to the latest available Harvard data, roughly 29 million adults take an aspirin a day despite having no known heart disease. Of that figure, about 6.6 million are doing so independently—without a doctor's recommendation.

Your health care provider can recommend prevention strategies based on your health history. Lower-risk options like lifestyle changes and screenings can help prevent heart disease in some. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about taking aspirin.



## Healthy & Nutritious Healthier Eating Habits

Replacing unhealthy eating habits with healthier ones can be difficult, especially if unhealthy habits are all you have ever known. A key to making lasting improvements in your diet is to make changes in stages. Start with a small, simple change and stick to it for a week. Once mastering one change, add another. Try these ideas to get on track:

**Set an Example** Parents play a big role in guiding their children's eating habits with the examples they set, the foods they make available in the home, and the mealtime experiences that they create for their families. E.g., teaching appropriate portions sizes helps; a snack for a typical adult may be a single-serving container of yogurt, but two or three tablespoons is plenty for a preschooler.

### **Make Eating Fun for the Whole Family**

Family meals can be a time to monitor what children are eating and to reconnect with each other. Involve children in food preparation and clean up, and sit down with them when they eat. The idea is to build healthy eating habits.

**Planning is Key** Plan as many home-cooked meals as you can, as they usually have fewer calories, more reasonable portions, and cost less overall.