

40 MYTHS & FACTS HEART DISEASE

Knowledge is the key to a healthier heart!

Learn the <mark>facts,</mark> break the <mark>myths,</mark> and take proactive steps to protect your heart.

Explore our guide to separate fact from myth and <mark>empower yourself</mark> with the information you need to make heart-healthy choices.

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40 MYTHS & FACTS HEART DISEASE

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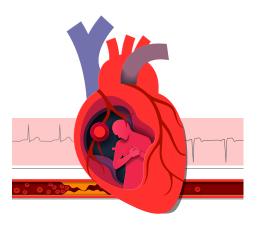
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ALL ABOUT YOUR HEART HEALTH

Did you know?

- Cardiovascular diseases are a group of diseases affecting the heart and blood vessels.
- They are the leading cause of death across the world.
- They cause 17.9 million deaths every year.



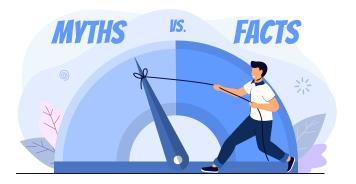


- 90% of heart diseases are preventable.
- Choosing the right lifestyle is the key to heart health!

The heart of the matter: **Myths** *vs.* **facts** about cardiac health

Over the past decade, enormous research has been done about heart diseases and there is enough information in the cyberspace about heart diseases. But unless you follow medical news closely, there's a chance you might have misconceptions about heart diseases.

The myths about heart diseases might deviate you from taking the right path towards protecting yourself against these diseases. Here are a few commonly held myths about heart health; replacing these myths with facts will give you the right information so that you take the best path towards heart health.



02

BREAKING THE MYTHS ABOUT LIFESTYLE AND Heart Diseases





I have smoked for years; even if I quit now, my risk of heart disease will not reduce.



The benefits of quitting smoking start the minute you quit, irrespective of how long you have been smoking. Your risk of heart disease will reduce by 50% after 1 year of quitting. In 10 years of quitting, the risk is equal to that of someone who never smoked.



My parents had heart attacks, so there's no way I can avoid heart disease.



Even people with a family history of heart attacks or heart disease can lower their risk significantly by working on things they can control. They can choose a healthy diet comprising of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables; choose foods with healthy fats (e.g., olive oil, salmon, etc.); and stay physically active.







I have had a heart failure, so I should not exercise.



Being sedentary causes more damage to your health. Exercise benefits even people with heart and blood vessel diseases. Aerobic exercise (e.g., walking, stationary cycling, water aerobics, etc.) can improve circulation, reduce heart disease risk factors, and strengthen the cardiovascular system.



If I have heart disease, I must avoid eating all fat.



A person with heart disease should reduce the intake of foods with saturated fats (e.g., butter, biscuits, palm oil, coconut oil, etc.) and partially hydrogenated and trans fats (e.g., baked goods, and frozen pizzas). They can consume foods with unsaturated fats, such as omega-3 (e.g., salmon, walnuts, and flaxseeds); they provide protection to the heart.





I do not use table salt; hence, I need not worry much about sodium intake.

V Fact

Limiting salt/sodium intake is not just by avoiding table salt. Salt is present in several foods at high quantities; the CDC estimates that 40% of sodium consumed everyday is through breads, pizzas, cold cuts and cured meats, soups, burritos and tacos, savory snacks, chicken, cheese, and eggs. Ultra-processed foods, such as chips, soft drinks, etc., are high in salt. Hence, reading the food labels is important.





Wine is good for heart health; it keeps hypertension at bay.



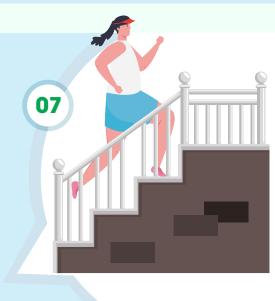
Recent research shows that alcohol in any form has no beneficial value. Heavy and regular alcohol consumption can increase blood pressure drastically and can also cause heart failure and stroke. It is best to avoid alcohol consumption.

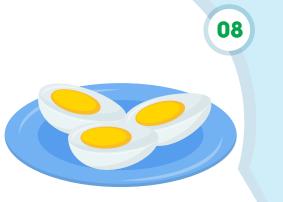


Exercising vigorously for 2–3 hours per week ensures good heart health.



Performing moderate-to-vigorous exercises for 5 or 6 sessions per week will reduce the risk of heart disease-related deaths. One should aim for 30 minutes of activity a day. The key is to stop sitting and get moving. Simple activities, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or vacuuming the house are helpful.







Eggs are bad for heart health because of cholesterol content.

V Fact

The liver makes cholesterol primarily from saturated fat and trans-fat in our diet, not dietary cholesterol. Further, a large egg contains little saturated fat of ~1.5 g. It also contains several nutrients, such as lutein, zeaxanthin, choline, and vitamins (A, B, and D). Thus, for most people, an egg a day does not increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

BREAKING THE MYTHS ABOUT CHOLESTEROL AND HEART HEALTH





I don't have to worry about my cholesterol levels and get it checked until I am middle-aged.



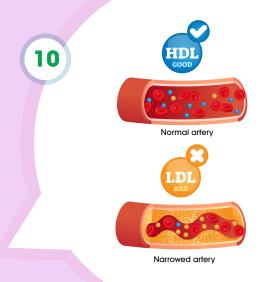
The American Heart Association recommends that cholesterol levels must be regularly checked once in 5 years right from the age of 20. If there's a family history of heart disease, it's even wiser to commence cholesterol level checks at an earlier age.

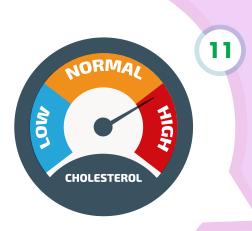


Cholesterol in all forms is bad for heart health.



Total cholesterol in the body is a sum of bad cholesterol (low density lipoprotein) and good cholesterol (high density lipoprotein). Too much of bad cholesterol is bad for the heart as it can clog the arteries. On the other hand, good cholesterol can reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke.







If I have high cholesterol, I will experience symptoms.



High cholesterol in most cases does not show up symptoms. Symptoms are experienced only in the later stages, where excessive cholesterol blocks the blood vessels and can cause chest pain and heart attack. Hence, it is important to get blood cholesterol levels checked regularly.



If cholesterol levels have increased, I cannot do anything about it.



Lifestyle changes can improve cholesterol levels. One can reduce consumption of foods high in saturated fats (e.g., red meat), eat foods high in omega-3 fatty acids (e.g., salmon, flaxseeds, etc.), increase soluble fiber intake (e.g., apples, etc.), and engage in 30 minutes of exercise 5 times/week. It is also important to keep a watch on body weight, and avoid alcohol and smoking.







Everyone should aim for the same cholesterol targets.



Target levels of cholesterol varies for individuals based on family history/personal history, and risk factors of heart attack and stroke (e.g., high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity). LDL cholesterol levels should be <70 mg/dL for those with a history of heart disease or diabetes; it should be <100 mg/dL for those without a history of heart diseases.

07



High cholesterol is present only in overweight and obese people.

V Fact

People of any body type can have high cholesterol. Being overweight or obese increases your chances of having high cholesterol, but being thin doesn't protect you. Irrespective of age, weight, and lifestyle, one must regularly go for check-ups.



Only men can have high cholesterol.



Before menopause, women have high estrogen levels that offer protection against cholesterol and heart diseases. But after menopause, cholesterol levels can change in women. While heart diseases in women tend to occur later in life, they continue to be the primary cause of death among women. 15





Children need not worry about cholesterol.



High cholesterol levels are not exclusive to adults; children can also experience elevated cholesterol levels. This is especially relevant for children who inherit high cholesterol from one or both parents, a condition known as familial hypercholesterolemia (FH). Such children are at a higher risk for premature heart attack or stroke.



I can maintain my cholesterol through diet and exercise; there's no need for statins or other medications.



Although adopting a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity can help achieve favorable cholesterol levels, some individuals such as those with diabetes, heart diseases, or those with high risk of heart diseases, may need medications, such as statins, to lower their cholesterol levels.



Statins block both the bad and good cholesterol in the body



Statin therapy blocks the enzyme needed by the liver to produce cholesterol. Statins only reduce low-density lipoprotein (the bad cholesterol). They do not lower high-density lipoprotein (good cholesterol) but can increase them. Further, higher levels of good cholesterol improve heart health. 18 600 CHOLESTEROL





If I take medicines to lower cholesterol levels, I can eat anything.



If you are taking statins but still consume foods high in cholesterol and saturated fat, the drug's effectiveness may be diminished, and your cholesterol levels might not decrease; in turn your cholesterol levels might increase.

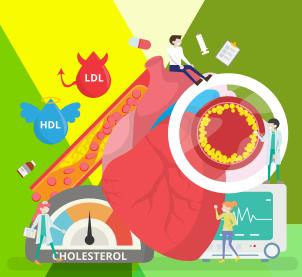




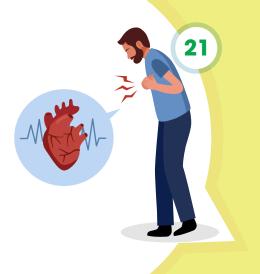
Stress, heart disease, and cholesterol are nowhere linked.



Stress can make people turn to unhealthy coping habits like eating too much, drinking too much alcohol, or smoking. These habits can raise cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease. Additionally, stress can trigger physical changes in your body, such as shifts in hormone levels (e.g., cortisol) and blood components, which can also lead to higher cholesterol levels.



BREAKING THE MYTHS ABOUT RISK FACTORS OF HEART DISEASES





Heart disease affects only the older population group.



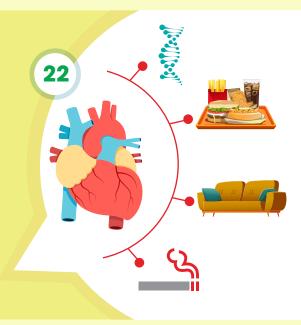
While heart diseases are more prevalent in individuals aged 65 and older, 4–10% of heart attacks occur in those aged lesser than 45 years. Lifestyle choices during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood play a crucial role in shaping our heart health as we grow older. So, laying heart health foundation right from childhood is important.



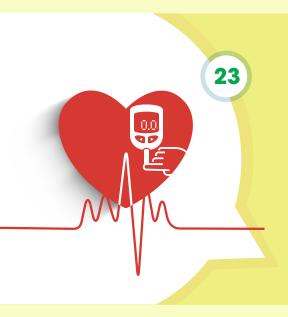
Heart disease occurs only if it runs in the family.



Heredity and genetics play a role in heart disease. However, unhealthy lifestyle choices (e.g., poor diet, inactivity, smoking) are responsible for 90% of heart diseases. These harmful choices increase the risk of heart disease by increasing cholesterol levels, increasing blood pressure and causing diabetes and metabolic syndrome.



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If I have diabetes, I just have to keep my blood sugar under control.



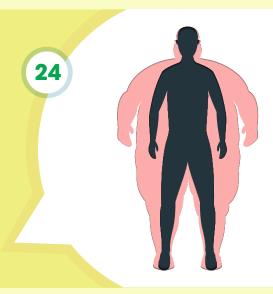
Diabetes is not just about blood sugar levels. People with diabetes are more likely to be overweight, and also have high blood pressure, too much bad cholesterol, and high triglyceride levels that can increase the risk of heart diseases. It is important to discuss thoroughly with your physician about the medications and lifestyle tips to keep blood sugar under control as well as your heart healthy.

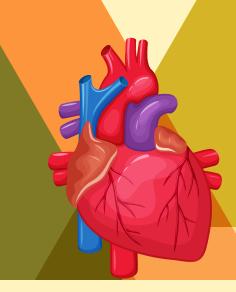


Being thin means no heart disease.



Being slim doesn't mean zero risk for heart disease. A thin or heathy weight person could have high cholesterol (due to age, lifestyle, and family history). Even thin/healthy weight people are at a risk of heart diseases if they have smoking habit and lead a sedentary lifestyle.





BREAKING THE MYTHS MANIFESTATION AND OCCURRENCE OF HEART DISEASES





A fast-beating heart is a sign of a heart attack.

V Fact

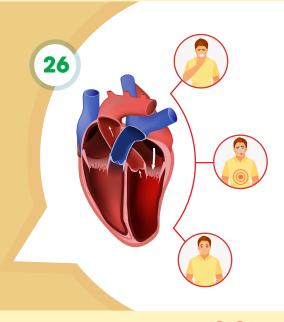
This need not be true. The heart can beat faster for several reasons. For example, when we're anxious, certain nerves called sympathetic nerves become active, causing an increase in heart rate. Heartbeats can also rise when we are frightened or have a fever. Certain heart-related diseases can contribute to an increased heart rate.

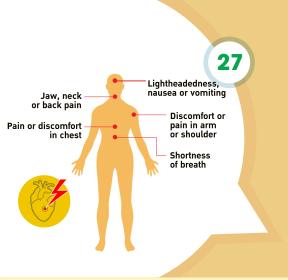


A person can in no way know if he gets a heart failure.



Heart failure often has a few early signs and symptoms. Some of them are fatigue for no reason, feeling out of breath, coughing, or wheezing when lying down. Feeling nauseous, swelling in the ankles or legs and weight gain due to fluid buildup are also signs of heart failure.







Every person gets the same symptoms of heart attack.



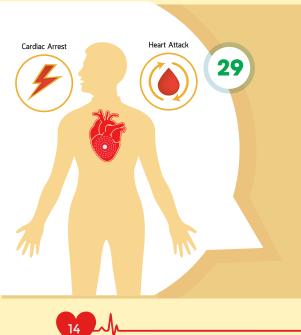
The most common symptom of heart attack is chest pain; however, the symptoms can vary from person to person. Some people may experience shortness of breath, chest discomfort, the feeling of being sick, or jaw pain or back pain without any chest pain.



A minor heart attack is not serious.



A heart attack should never be measured as minor or major. Heart attack should be dealt with carefully through proper medical consultation. A heart attack, considered minor, might go unnoticed; however, it is a big warning that you have a serious heart disease, and the next attack might be life-threatening. 28

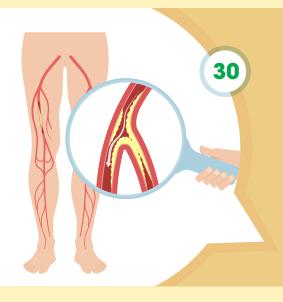




Heart attack and cardiac arrest are one and the same.



People often use these terms interchangeably, but they're not the same. A heart attack is when blood flow to the heart is blocked. Sudden cardiac arrest is when the heart malfunctions and suddenly stops beating. A heart attack is a "circulation" problem and sudden cardiac arrest is an "electrical" problem.





Pain in my legs has no links with heart health.



While some may attribute leg pain to stress, it's essential to recognize that it could also stem from the buildup of arterial plaque, a symptom of heart disease. Those affected by this condition have an increased risk of peripheral artery disease, as well as experiencing a heart attack or stroke.

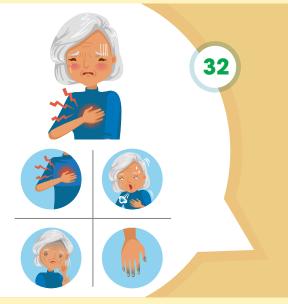


Heart attacks always end in death.



Although heart attacks can pose a significant threat to life, prompt medical attention and appropriate treatment often lead to successful outcomes. The key is recognizing the symptoms and seeking help as soon as possible.





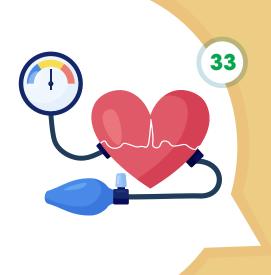


Angina is just chest pain.



Angina occurs due to problems in receiving oxygenated blood by the heart. Angina is not just chest pain; it is accompanied by other symptoms, such as burning sensation in the chest, shortness of breath, light-headedness, numbness and tingling, and fatigue during exercise. The key is to recognize the symptoms and consult a doctor.

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I will know if I am having high blood pressure.



High blood pressure is a silent killer that often goes unnoticed. The only way to know if you have it is through regular blood pressure monitoring. When blood pressure reaches exceptionally high levels, individuals may experience intense headaches, chest pain, fatigue, and more. Neglecting hypertension can lead to severe health complications such as stroke, heart disease, and kidney failure.

BREAKING THE MYTHS ABOUT THE MANAGEMENT OF HEART DISEASES





Heart diseases cannot be treated.



Heart diseases can be treated in various ways ranging from medication to surgery. Medication along with a proper diet can improve heart health. Surgery helps get rid of clogged arteries. If a valve is damaged beyond repair, it can be replaced. Heart pumps are also a part of treatment.

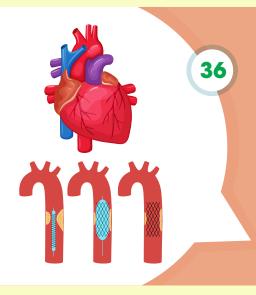


Exercise should be avoided after a heart attack.



Supervised exercise programs, such as those in cardiac rehabilitation programs, result in improved outcomes in patients. These programs have been found to be beneficial in patients with heart attack, acute coronary syndrome, chronic stable angina, congestive heart





Angioplasty, bypass surgery or stenting are a permanent solution for heart disease.

V Fact

These procedures stand out as successful interventions for addressing narrow artery blockages, but they do not address the underlying heart disease. To prevent further artery blockages, it remains crucial to make lifestyle modifications, including adopting a healthy diet and engaging in regular exercise.



Vitamins can prevent heart diseases.



While most vitamins, when taken at recommended doses, are unlikely to have adverse effects on heart health, there is no substantiated evidence that vitamin supplements can lower the risk of heart disease. Moreover, they cannot serve as a substitute for a nutritious diet and regular exercise.







If my blood pressure improves with medication, I can discontinue the medication.



High blood pressure/hypertension is a lifelong condition. While there might not be any problems initially after discontinuing medications, in the long run hypertension can recur. Hence, medicines should not be stopped without consulting a doctor.



Hypertension is curable.



At present, there is no cure for hypertension. Nevertheless, there are strategies to effectively manage the condition and minimize its impact on one's health, such as checking on alcohol consumption, maintaining a healthy diet, engaging in regular exercise, and practicing stress management.



Coughing vigorously during a heart attack can save life.



There is no evidence to support the thought that you can help yourself by coughing vigorously if you think you're having a heart attack and are alone. This method is only effective in maintaining circulation for a minute or two after cardiac arrest. One should not delay seeking medical help in the event of experiencing symptoms.



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