



Patient education: Lowering your risk of heart disease (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What is heart disease?

In people with heart disease, the arteries that supply blood to the heart get clogged with fatty deposits ([figure 1](#)). This increases the risk of heart attack and other heart problems.

Heart disease is also called "coronary artery disease."

How do I know if I am at risk for heart disease?

Certain things increase a person's risk of heart disease. These include health conditions like:

- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease

Your risk is also higher if you:

- Smoke
 - Eat a diet that is high in red meat, sugar, and fats, and low in fruits and vegetables
 - Do not get regular physical activity
 - Have obesity
 - Have depression or high stress levels
 - Have a parent or sibling with heart disease
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Is there anything I can do to lower my risk of heart disease?

Yes. You can:

- Quit smoking, if you smoke – If you are having trouble quitting, your doctor or nurse can help.
- Eat a healthy diet – Eat lots of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products. Don't eat a lot of meats, sweets, or refined grains.
- Limit alcohol – If you drink, limit the amount to:
 - For females, no more than 1 drink a day
 - For males, no more than 2 drinks a day
- Increase physical activity – Experts recommend trying to be active for at least 30 minutes a day on most days of the week. Even gentle forms of exercise, like walking or gardening, are good for your health.
- Keep a healthy body weight – Excess body weight or obesity can raise the risk of heart disease.
- Find ways to manage stress – This can include things like yoga, relaxation techniques, and breathing exercises. If you are struggling with stress or anxiety, your doctor or nurse might suggest other treatments that can help.
- Take medicines, if your doctor prescribes them – You might get medicines to help manage your cholesterol, blood pressure, or blood sugar. If so, follow all instructions for taking them.

Doing these things will also help your overall health.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Coronary artery disease \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Atherosclerosis \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Heart attack \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: High cholesterol \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Can foods or supplements lower cholesterol? \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: High blood pressure in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Controlling your blood pressure through lifestyle \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Heart-healthy diet \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Exercise and movement \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Heart attack \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: High cholesterol and lipids \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: High blood pressure in adults \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: High blood pressure, diet, and weight \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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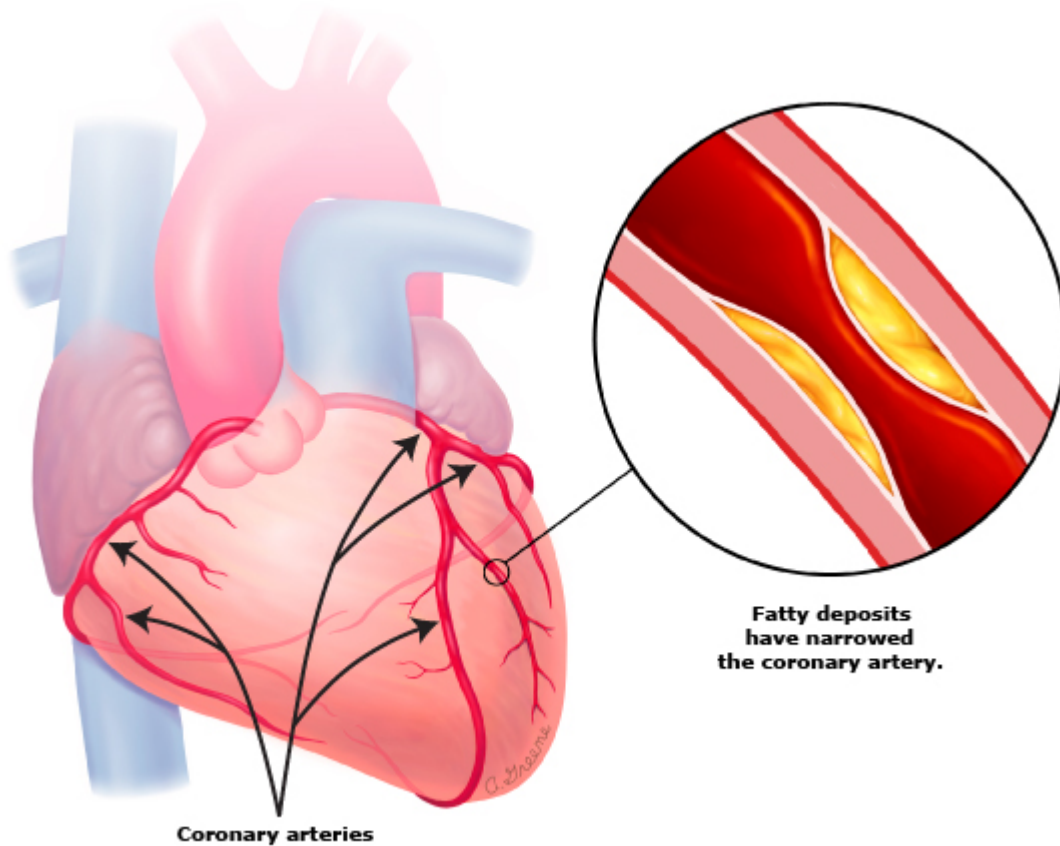
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GRAPHICS

Coronary heart disease



In people with coronary heart disease, the coronary arteries get clogged with fatty deposits called plaques.

Graphic 61785 Version 5.0

