

Happy Heart Month!

February is Heart Month. Here's how to prevent heart disease, what signs and symptoms to look for, and five tips for living your healthiest life.

Heart disease is the second leading cause of death in Canada, and the leading cause of death among Canadian women. With February marking Heart Month, we're turning our attention to spreading awareness about heart disease and how you can improve your heart's health starting today.

What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is a blanket term that comprises a variety of conditions that affect the heart's ability to function properly. The most common type is coronary artery disease, where plaque builds up in the arteries blocking the flow of blood and oxygen to and from the heart. These conditions can lead to heart attacks and eventually heart failure when not taken care of.

Heart disease is often mistaken for a merely genetic condition, but according to the Heart & Stroke Foundation, 80% of premature heart disease and stroke is preventable through lifestyle changes. While a family history of heart disease does put you at higher risk, it is our everyday behaviors and habits that are the biggest contributors to developing heart disease.

Preventing Heart Disease and Stroke

A healthy heart starts with a healthy lifestyle. To reduce your chances of developing heart disease or increasing the severity of an existing heart condition, the Heart & Stroke Foundation recommends:

- Being physically active
- Eating a healthy diet (one that is lower in fats, especially trans and saturated fats)
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Being smoke free
- Maintaining a healthy weight

Signs and Symptoms of Heart Disease

While the number of adults diagnosed with heart disease is decreasing overall in Canada, one in 12 Canadians still live with diagnosed heart disease, the Public Health Agency of Canada [reports](#).

If you experience any of the following symptoms, talk to your doctor about being tested for heart disease:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Fainting

If you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes, you're at higher risk of developing heart disease. Managing these conditions is crucial to preventing and reversing some of the side-effects of heart disease; so visit your doctor regularly and follow their advice.

The earlier heart disease is detected, the better one's chances are of reducing and even preventing complications down the line.

5 Tips for Healthy Living

Here are some suggestions to help you lower your chances of developing heart disease:

1. **Move your body:** Physical activity lowers your chances of developing heart disease and other conditions. Aim for 30 minutes a day. Walking is an excellent place to start.
2. **Reduce stress:** Exercise, meditation and unplugging from technology are just some of the ways you can reduce stress in your life.
3. **Cook meals at home:** Take out may be convenient, but these meals are overloaded with sodium and fats. Cooking at home is the easiest way to ensure you're putting healthy fuel in your body. Add lots of heart-healthy, leafy greens, omega-3s and healthy nuts such as almonds and walnuts.
4. **Get enough sleep:** Your body needs time to rest, restore and rejuvenate. Not getting enough Zs puts you at higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease, the World Health Organization [reports](#).
5. **Be proactive:** Prevention is your best defence against heart disease. Talk to your doctor about your concerns and don't ignore warning signs or gut feelings that something might be wrong.

A healthy heart is a happy heart. Why not embrace a healthier lifestyle this month, and every month. Your heart—and your health—will thank you for it.

Sources:

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