

# Surprising Facts About Heart Health

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## If You Think You're Too Young For Heart Issues, These Facts Will Shock You



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When you're young and in your prime — late 20's, 30's and even your early 40's — heart disease isn't something that's typically on your mind. Especially for the fit and active, heart health can even be taken for granted.

But, attention young men: heart disease can affect you too. So from obvious things like smoking to even those times you ordered takeout on the regular, yeah, those things take their toll later on. You don't get those days back.

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“Even if you’re healthy and exercising, if your diet isn’t good or you’re doing things like smoking, you’re increasing your overall risk of heart disease down the line,” explains [Dr. Lawrence Phillips](#), MD, cardiologist and assistant professor at NYU Langone Medical Center, Department of Medicine, Leon H. Charney Division of Cardiology. “Good behaviors that start early continue throughout life. Putting off health for a later time never works.”

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In light of the American Heart Association’s Red Ball Gala May 13 in New York City, an fundraising event aimed at heart health education and stressing the importance of a healthy lifestyle, we decided to take a closer look at heart health.

“Knowing your body, owning your risk and being proactive about heart health is the best way to take care of yourself,” Dr. Phillips says.

### **1. Risk factors are silent.**

According to a [report from the American Heart Association](#), half of all the men who die of cardiac disease have had no previous symptoms. While a having a stroke or a heart attack are clear signs of a heart health issue, they’re the worst-case scenarios. But it doesn't have to get to that.

“We know that when it comes to high blood pressure, people can have elevations for 10 years before it’s diagnosed,” says Dr. Phillips. “All heart disease has increased risk over time, so if we can stop the risk over time, we can decrease the chances of heart attack and death.”

No matter your physical health, be sure you’re seeing a doctor at least yearly.

### **2. High blood pressure and cholesterol checked are "silent killers."**

You might think your blood pressure is in check, but factors like anxiety and even your body build can spike it, explains Dr. Phillips. Your cholesterol levels can have nothing to do with your physical fitness, but may be affected by a genetic abnormality that causes your levels to increase. “The two biggest contributors to heart disease are elevated cholesterol and high blood pressure,” says [Dr. Jared Knopman](#), MD, neurosurgeon and interventional neuroradiologist at Weill-Cornell Medical College, New York Presbyterian Hospital. “These are the ‘silent killers’ because they don't cause problems until it's too late.

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The good news? It’s easy to manage and control both with proper monitoring. Most men aren’t afraid of having physical exams, but notorious neglect visits to the doctor. The effort is worth it in the long run.

“If your blood pressure is normal, you won’t have to follow up for several years,” says Dr. Phillips. “But if there is an issue, you can get on top of it right away.”

### **3. Only 25 percent of men have met the federal guidelines for physical activity.**

That’s right. Only a quarter of guys are moving enough. And “enough” equates to about 30 minutes of moderate activity per day. Federal guidelines suggest avoiding inactivity and doing one of the following for aerobic activity:

- 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity
- 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- An equivalent combination of both

What’s the best way to be sure you’re hitting your mark? “Try doing 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity per day,” says Dr. Knopman. “Exercise lowers bad cholesterol, or LDL levels, and raises your good cholesterol levels, or HDL. This helps with heart disease prevention, which is key.”

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### **4. Smoking isn’t just bad for your lungs.**

You’d have to be living under a rock not to know that smoking increases the risk of heart disease. But you may not know why.

Smoking makes plaques in the blood vessel valves unstable. “When we talk about narrowing of the blood vessel, there is the possibility for them to break open like a volcano which causes a heart attack,” says Dr. Phillips. “And smoking increases the likelihood of them busting.”

So whether you’re still buying packs or using e-cigs, try to quit the habit ASAP. “There’s too much we know about the negative impacts of smoking on heart disease, strokes and other medical issues to be doing it,” says Dr. Phillips.