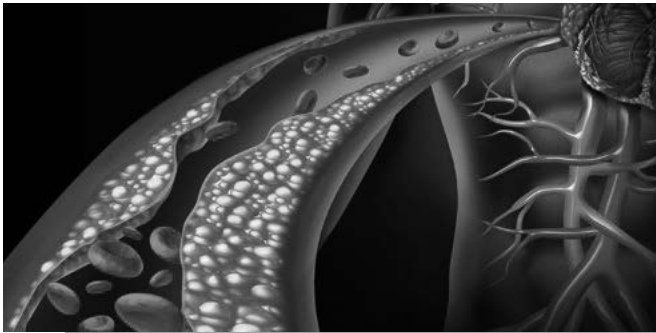
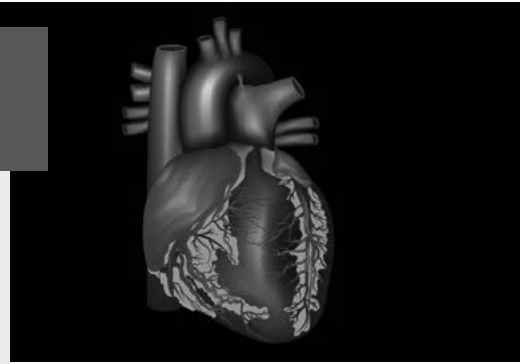


HEART OF THE MATTER

How's Your Heart?



HOW DOES THE HEART WORK?

To achieve and maintain heart health, let's first understand how the heart works. The heart is a strong muscle. In a healthy person, it is usually the size of your fist. Your heart has two sides. Both sides have a top chamber (atrium) and a bottom chamber (ventricle). The right side of your heart gets blood from the body and pumps it to your lungs to get oxygen. The left side of your heart will take that oxygen-rich blood and pump it through your body using the arteries.

As we age or for other health-related reasons, this extraordinary muscle may weaken or malfunction. This creates risk for heart disease.

AGING AND HEART DISEASE

One of the most common aging changes in the heart is called atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries in the heart. Over time, the walls of the arteries in the heart, which deliver oxygen to the heart muscle, can become clogged with fatty deposits. That means blood is not able to easily flow through these arteries. This can lead to chest pain, angina and heart attacks.

Aging can cause other changes in the heart. The walls of the heart chambers may thicken due to high blood pressure or abnormal valves causing the heart to fill with blood more slowly. The heart chambers may enlarge due to abnormal heart valves or heart attacks causing blood and fluid to back up in the heart and lungs. All of these problems can lead to abnormal heart rhythm.

With aging, valves may become thicker, stiffer or leaky, which limits the flow of blood out of the heart or can cause the blood to flow backward. Valves are like doorways that control the blood flow between the chambers of the heart.

Be Kind To Your Heart



WHAT CAN I DO?

As with our general health, it is easier to preserve heart health than it is to treat it. Now that we better understand the important role our heart plays in our overall health, let's look at some of the ways to be kind to your heart.

Manage Stress

Science is taking a closer look at how stress may affect our heart health. Some research shows that stress can lead to behaviors, such as smoking, overeating, poor sleep habits and low level of physical activity. These behaviors increase your risk of heart disease.

Quit Smoking

This is a tough one. But this is one of the times you want to be a quitter! Smoking is linked to heart disease. The positive effects of quitting smoking can begin within 20 minutes after your last cigarette.

**For more
information on
these topics,
you can visit
www.heart.org**

Get Active

You and your doctor can come up with a plan that includes your target heart rate and an activity you enjoy. Finding the right activity can help you stick with your goal.

Healthy Eating

Eating fruits, vegetables and whole grains can help protect your heart. A heart healthy diet includes foods that are low in saturated and trans fats.

