

Heart Health

Optimum heart health involves paying attention to a lot of different factors. There's cholesterol (but not just cholesterol—there's good cholesterol, bad cholesterol, total cholesterol, oh my!), triglycerides, blood pressure, inflammation markers like C-reactive protein, not to mention omega-3 levels and even vitamin D! It's enough to make your head spin trying to look after your ticker.

Let's break it down. First of all, there are different types of heart disease, but atherosclerosis takes the cake. Atherosclerosis involves a buildup of plaque in the artery walls, causing a thickening of the arteries, which blocks blood flow. Eventually the plaque can rupture, causing a blood clot, which can be dangerous, even leading to stroke or death.

Cholesterol levels are usually first on everyone's mind when it comes to heart health. You want to have plenty of good (HDL) cholesterol, and not too much bad (LDL) cholesterol, all while making sure your total cholesterol is at the right level. Whew! Next—triglycerides. Those can't be too high either. Then there's inflammation. Inflammation takes many forms in the body, but one way it can be measured is with a blood test for C-reactive protein (hsCRP).

All this usually begins with poor diet, lack of exercise and chronic systemic inflammation (which can be caused by a number of factors, including digestive imbalance). **Fortunately, this is one condition that can be stopped in its tracks, and even reversed. But it's up to you to stop it.**

Take a look at your diet. Are you eating plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, healthy fats and plenty of water? Do you exercise regularly? Do you have digestive issues that are bogging you down? Start from the inside out: **Clean up your diet**—you need at least 35 grams daily of dietary fiber from vegetables, fruits, whole grains and a fiber supplement if needed. Reduce sugar intake, and avoid processed and refined foods. Eat foods rich in healthy omega-3 fats, or take a fish oil supplement.

Balance your digestive system—correct digestive imbalances with probiotics from fermented foods and good quality probiotic supplements.

Reduce toxin exposure—install HEPA air filters inside your home, choose organic foods when possible and clean with non-toxic cleaners.

Drink plenty of water—half your body weight in ounces per day (if you weigh 140 lbs., that's 70 ounces daily!).

Exercise regularly—at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise 5 days per week, and strength training 2 to 3 days per week.

Bottom line is that you can make the necessary lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease. Your heart will most certainly thank you for it!