



Heart Healthy at any age

Wellness Advocate

Did you know heart disease can begin in childhood and adolescence? One in three Americans has cardiovascular disease, but not all of them are senior citizens. Even young and middle-aged people can develop heart problems — especially now that obesity, type 2 diabetes and other risk factors are becoming more common at a younger age.

In fact, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. Every year, one in four deaths are caused by heart disease. The good news? Heart disease can often be prevented when people make healthy choices and manage their health conditions. Celebrate American Heart Month with us by learning how to protect your heart for LIFE!

IN YOUR 20s

- ▶ **Find a doctor and have regular wellness exams.** Healthy people need doctors, too. Establishing a relationship with a physician means you can start heart-health screenings now.
- ▶ **Be physically active.** It's a lot easier to be active and stay active if you start at a young age. Keep your workout routine interesting by mixing it up and finding new motivators.
- ▶ **Don't smoke.** If you picked up smoking as a teen, it's time to quit. Even exposure to secondhand smoke poses a serious health hazard.

IN YOUR 30s

- ▶ **Make heart-healthy living a family affair.** Create and sustain heart-healthy habits in your kids and you'll reap the benefits, too. Explore a nearby park on foot or bike. Plant a vegetable and fruit garden together in the yard, and invite your kids into the kitchen to help cook.
- ▶ **Know your family history.** Having a relative with heart disease increases your risk, especially if the relative is a parent or sibling.
- ▶ **Tame your stress.** Long-term stress causes an increase in heart rate and blood pressure that may damage the artery walls. Try deep breathing exercises and find time each day to do something you enjoy. Giving back through volunteering also does wonders for knocking out stress.

IN YOUR 40s

- ▶ **Watch your weight.** In your 40s, your metabolism starts slowing down. But you can avoid weight gain by following a heart-healthy diet and getting plenty of exercise. The trick is to find a workout routine you enjoy.
- ▶ **Have your blood sugar level checked by age 45.** This first test serves as a baseline for future tests, which you should have every three years. Testing may be done earlier or more often if you are overweight, diabetic or at risk for becoming diabetic.
- ▶ **Don't brush off snoring.** One in five adults has at least mild sleep apnea, a condition that causes pauses in breathing during sleep. If not properly treated, sleep apnea can contribute to high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

IN YOUR 50s

- ▶ **Eat a healthy diet.** It's easy to slip into some unhealthy eating habits, so refresh your eating habits by eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, fiber-rich whole grains, fish (preferably oily, cold water fish at least twice per week), nuts, legumes and seeds. Try eating some meals without meat.
- ▶ **Know the warning signs of a heart attack and stroke.** Now is the time to get savvy about symptoms. Not everyone experiences sudden numbness with a stroke or severe chest pain with a heart attack. And heart attack symptoms in women can be different than men. [Learn more.](#)

IN YOUR 60s and Up

- ▶ **Have an ankle-brachial index test.** Starting in your 60s, an ankle-brachial index test should be done as part of a physical exam. The test checks the pulses in the feet to help diagnose peripheral artery disease (PAD), a lesser-known heart disease in which plaque builds up in the leg arteries.
- ▶ **Lower your calorie intake.** Your body burns fewer calories as you get older. Exercising regularly and eating smaller portions of nutrient-rich foods will help you maintain a healthy weight.

(article courtesy of heart.org)

The Mind-Body Connection

How you handle stress has an important effect on your health. When you're stressed or anxious, your body reacts as if it is under attack. Your body releases hormones that speed up your heart rate and breathing, increase blood pressure, and make your muscles tense. This physical reaction is called the fight-or-flight stress response.

In fact, the past few decades have been rich with studies and breakthroughs in the connection between our minds and our bodies. Harvard cardiologist Herbert Benson, MD, identified the flip side of the stress response, which he called the "relaxation response." Benson proved that meditation and other relaxation techniques can bring about physical changes, including a lower heart rate, lower breathing rate, and decreased muscle tension, along with positive changes in brain waves.

Innovative research by Dean Ornish, MD, found that a program integrating mind-body techniques such as yoga, meditation, stress management and group support with diet and exercise reversed coronary artery disease. "What we are finding is that comprehensive lifestyle changes may 'turn on' the beneficial parts of our genes and 'turn off' the more harmful parts," says Dr. Ornish.

These are just two examples of the studies on this subject. But what does it all mean for you? The research says we have a lot more mental control of our physical illnesses than we think. Take steps today to lower your stress, calm your thoughts and have a positive frame of mind. The HealthSmart Wellness Advocate Program has workshops to help you manage stress. [Learn more!](#)

Recipe: Crunchy Peanut Butter Bulgur with Berries

Bulgur wheat is a whole wheat grain that has been cracked and partially pre-cooked. It is naturally high-fiber and low-fat and has a light, nutty flavor. Look in the bulk foods section or in the baking aisle of your favorite grocery store. Nearly all health food stores stock bulgur wheat.



Ingredients

- 1 cup uncooked bulgur wheat (we used Bob's Red Mill)
- 1 1/2 cups 1% low-fat milk (soy or almond milk may be substituted)
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- 1/2 cup fresh or frozen berries (strawberries, blackberries, etc.)
- 1 tablespoon plain fat-free Greek yogurt
- 2 teaspoons chopped peanuts, pecans or walnuts
- Drizzle of honey (optional)

Preparation

Combine uncooked bulgur and milk in a small bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Fluff in the morning. Place 3/4 cup soaked grains in a small microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at HIGH for 1 minute. Stir in peanut butter. Top with berries, yogurt, and chopped nuts.

Nutrition Information per serving: 327 calories | 12.8 g fat | 126 mg sodium
43.5 g carbohydrates | 11.9 g dietary fiber | 14.8 g protein