

HEALTH HUB
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THE TIN MAN'S GUIDE TO A HEALTHIER HEART

ACTIONABLE STEPS FOR "RUST-FREE" LIVING



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Heart Disease

Heart disease has been the leading cause of death in the U.S. for decades, accounting for about one in every five deaths. Let's take a closer look at what heart disease actually means and how small, everyday choices can help protect your heart at any age.

It's an Umbrella Term

Heart disease isn't just one condition. It is a broad term used to describe several different heart-related issues, including:

- **Coronary Artery Disease:** Narrowing of the arteries.
- **Heart Attack:** When blood flow to the heart is blocked.
- **Arrhythmias:** Irregular heartbeats.
- **Heart Failure:** When the heart can't pump blood as well as it should.

Men are generally at higher risk at younger ages, but heart disease remains the number one cause of death for both men and women. Risk increases as we age, yet prevention is important at every stage of life.



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The "Silent" Risks: Do You Know Your Numbers?

The most dangerous thing about heart disease is that its primary drivers often have no noticeable symptoms. You can feel perfectly fine while your heart and blood vessels are under stress. The values below are general guidelines. Individual targets may vary, so talk with your provider about what's right for you. Three common conditions are described below.

1. Blood Pressure

High Blood Pressure (hypertension) occurs when the force of blood against your artery walls is too high. Reducing salt intake, increasing physical activity, and managing stress are important ways to keep these numbers in a healthy range. Because there are rarely physical signs, regular measurement is the only way to know your status. Normal Blood Pressure is less than 120/80 mmHg. Employee Wellness has a [Blood Pressure Lending Library](#) to borrow a blood pressure monitor for one month to track your readings daily.



2. Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance the body uses to make hormones and digest food. While we need some cholesterol, high cholesterol occurs when there is too much of it in the blood. Over time, this extra cholesterol can build up inside your arteries, narrowing them and restricting blood flow. Doctors use a simple blood test to measure these levels.

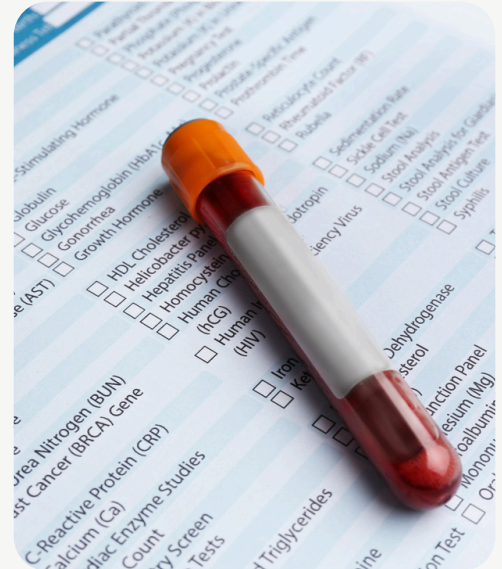
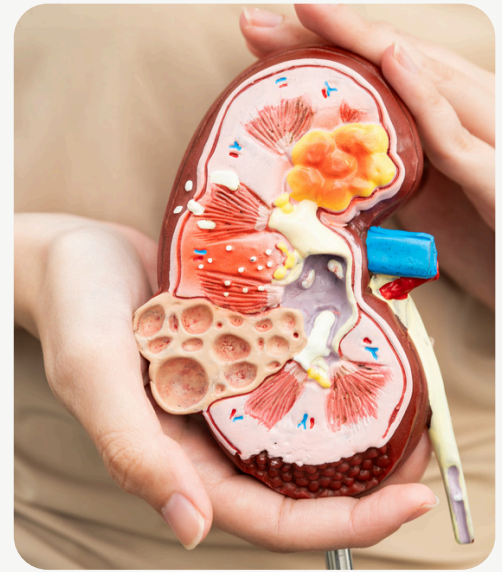
There are two main types: LDL (the "bad" kind) and HDL (the "good" kind). LDL contributes to fatty buildups in the arteries, increasing the risk of heart disease; ideally, LDL should be below 100 mg/dL. HDL, on the other hand, acts like a scavenger, carrying LDL away from the arteries and back to the liver to be broken down. Optimal HDL levels should be above 40 mg/dL for men or 50 mg/dL for women.



3. Type 2 Diabetes

Type 2 Diabetes occurs when your body either doesn't produce enough insulin or cannot use it effectively. Insulin is a hormone that acts like a "key," allowing blood sugar (glucose) to enter your cells to be used for energy. Without enough insulin, sugar builds up in the bloodstream instead. Over time, high blood sugar levels damage the blood vessels and the nerves that control your heart, significantly increasing the risk of heart disease.

To monitor your risk, doctors typically check your fasting blood sugar, which should be less than 100 mg/dL. They may also use an A1C test, which measures your average blood sugar over the past three months; a healthy A1C is typically below 5.7%. Managing your weight, staying active, and choosing complex carbohydrates (like whole grains and vegetables) over sugary foods can help keep your blood sugar in a safe range.



The Search for a Healthier Heart

In the Land of Oz, the Tin Man believed he was missing a heart. While he traveled the Yellow Brick Road in search of a heart, we are fortunate enough to already have our own; however, even the sturdiest tin man needs a little oil to keep from rusting, and our hearts are no different. Preventing heart disease isn't about magic wizards or ruby slippers; it's about the daily choices we make to keep our internal gears running smoothly. Following "rust prevention" strategies will help ensure your heart stays strong, healthy, and ready for whatever adventures lie over the rainbow.



Rust-Prevention Strategies for Heart Health

1. Putting Out the Fires: Quitting Tobacco

Smoking and vaping expose the body to chemicals that damage blood vessels and promote plaque buildup. Quitting improves circulation, lung function, and overall heart health, helping you breathe easier on the journey to the Emerald City. Join the Employee Wellness [Tobacco Cessation Program](#) to start your quit today!

2. Oil Your Joints: Prioritize Activity

Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week. Even short movement breaks throughout the day add up, strengthening the heart muscle and improving its efficiency.



3. Fuel for the Journey: Eat the Colors of the Rainbow

A heart-healthy diet includes fruits and vegetables, beans and legumes, lean proteins, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and healthy fats. Limit heavily processed foods, excess sodium, and saturated fats that can clog the system.



4. Travel Light on the Road: Maintain a Healthy Weight

Carrying extra weight puts additional strain on the heart and increases the risk of high blood pressure and diabetes. Even modest weight loss can significantly reduce heart strain.

5. Drift Off in the Poppy Fields: Prioritize Sleep

Aim for about seven hours of sleep per night. During deep sleep, heart rate and blood pressure drop, allowing your cardiovascular system time to rest and repair. Try to set a sleep schedule and go to sleep and wake up around the same times each day.

6. Calm the Wicked Winds: Stress Management

Chronic stress keeps the body in a constant state of alert, raising blood pressure and wearing down the heart over time. Techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness, yoga, or gentle stretching can help steady the system. Join Employee Wellness for a [guided mindfulness session](#).

7. Visit the Wizard for a Tune-Up: Get Regular Health Screenings

Annual check-ups provide a behind-the-curtain look at your heart health. Routine screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar can catch problems early before “rust” sets in.



8. Keep the Flying Monkeys at Bay: Prevent Infections

Poor oral health and chronic infections can contribute to inflammation in the body, which may increase heart risk over time. Brushing, flossing, and staying up to date on recommended vaccines help protect both your heart and overall health.

There's No Place Like a Healthy Home

The journey to heart health isn't a sprint, but a lifelong path made up of small, intentional choices. The Tin Man ultimately learned he didn't need a brand-new heart; he needed to care for the one he had. You can begin your heart-healthy journey today by starting with just one step to follow. Perhaps your first step is calling your doctor to schedule an annual physical exam. Taking these intentional steps ensures that you aren't just wishing for a healthy heart but actively protecting the one you already have.



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