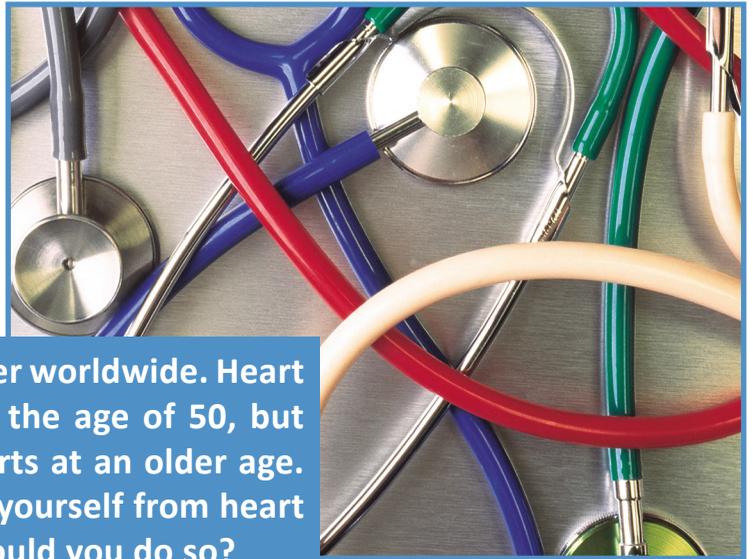


Heart health



Heart disease is the number one killer worldwide. Heart disease mainly affects people over the age of 50, but this does not mean the process starts at an older age. If you were in a position to protect yourself from heart disease 10 or so years from now, would you do so?

Most of the risk factors for heart disease are lifestyle factors. The following factors contribute to heart disease:

- **Elevated cholesterol**

Cholesterol is a type of fat found in the blood. There are several different types of fat in the blood. Some fat gets deposited in blood vessel walls and this leads to, or worsens, the blood vessels thickening. High cholesterol can be caused by genetic (hereditary) predisposition, diabetes, obesity, or a diet high in fat.

- **Lack of exercise**

Without regular physical activity, the heart muscle is not protected from blood vessel thickening and hardening. Those who develop good health habits in early life are more likely to continue these habits throughout their life. Aerobic exercise for 30-60 minutes on most days of the week should be encouraged to reduce the risk of heart disease.

- **Obesity**

Obesity predisposes individuals to heart disease through an increased risk of diabetes and elevated cholesterol. Fat deposited on the abdomen is particularly harmful.

How can you protect your heart?

Most of the risk factors for heart disease are lifestyle factors. This means that with healthy interventions as early as possible, there is more

chance of reducing your risk of heart disease. You can protect your heart health with the following:

- **Exercise**

Incorporate exercise as a part of your daily life. Enjoyment is key if you want to continue exercising throughout your life, so find some form of physical activity that you enjoy, be it swimming at a local pool, or simply taking your dog for a walk.

- **Healthy diet**

Along with a healthy weight and regular physical activity, an overall healthy diet can help to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels and prevent obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. This includes eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, lowering or cutting out added salt or sodium, and eating less saturated fat and cholesterol to lower these risks.

- **Stop smoking**

Nicotine in tobacco smoke can increase blood pressure, causing the heart to work harder and replace the oxygen in your blood with carbon monoxide. Smoking adds to the obstruction of the arteries which can lead to heart attack and other heart-related conditions.

- **Moderate alcohol use**

Excessive alcohol use increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. People who drink should do so only in moderation and always responsibly.