

Be young at heart

Are you young at heart? A number of factors can make your heart seem younger—or older—than it really is. While some factors lie beyond your control, you can take simple steps to control others and keep your heart as young as possible.

What is heart disease?

Heart disease is not a single condition. Instead, it's an umbrella term covering all the things that can go wrong with this vital organ. Each year, cardiovascular disease (including heart attack and stroke) claims nearly 18 million lives, making it the number-one cause of death worldwide¹.

Types of heart disease include:

- **Heart attack and angina** (chest pain or discomfort), which occur when blood vessels become clogged or hardened
- **Cardiac arrest**, an electrical problem that causes the heart to stop beating unexpectedly²
- **Stenosis**, a group of diseases that affect the heart valves³
- **Cardiomyopathy**, a group of diseases that affect the heart muscle⁴
- **Arrhythmia**, defined as rapid, slow or irregular heartbeat⁵

Heart disease risk factors

Key risk factors include age, gender and family history of heart disease. Social determinants of health—issues like food quality, housing and financial security—also play a role^{6,7}. Since you can't choose your parents, set your own age or easily change your environment, these factors are out of your hands.

But you have control over many other factors. When you lose weight, manage your stress levels, quit smoking, address high blood pressure and moderate alcohol use, you can improve your heart health⁸. Your heart is likely to feel younger, and so will you.

1 https://www.who.int/health-topics/cardiovascular-diseases/#tab=tab_1

2 <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-attack/about-heart-attacks>

3 <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-valve-problems-and-disease/heart-valve-problems-and-causes/problem-heart-valve-stenosis>

4 <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/cardiomyopathy/what-is-cardiomyopathy-in-adults>

5 <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/arrhythmia/about-arrhythmia>

6 <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cardiovascular-disease/>

7 <https://healthitanalytics.com/news/social-determinants-of-health-vital-for-assessing-heart-disease-risk>

8 <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cardiovascular-diseases-cvds>

Five ways to get heart-healthy

Focussing on modifiable risk factors can be the best way to prevent heart disease. Best of all, these actions could reduce the risk of other diseases at the same time.



Maintain a healthy weight

If you're overweight or obese, talk with your doctor about a diet and exercise plan to get your body mass index below 25.⁹ Use an credible BMI calculator to help you: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/risk-factors/your-weight-and-heart-disease>



Get physically active

Aim to get 30 minutes of moderate to strenuous exercise five days per week. Even 10-minute bursts make a difference.¹⁰



Stop smoking

Take steps now to quit smoking, which doubles your risk of heart disease.¹¹



Drink alcohol only in moderation

Limit yourself to two alcoholic drinks per day (for men) and one alcoholic drink per day (for women)¹²



Address high blood pressure

Check your numbers and talk with your doctor about ways to control your blood pressure.

What is your heart age? Use this simple calculator to determine how your heart age compares with your real age: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-health-check/check-your-heart-age-tool/>

Today is the perfect time to start becoming heart-healthy. At our Heart healthy resources hub, Aetna International members can find the information, tools and support needed to prevent and manage heart-related conditions. Aetna International members can also find help and resources in the Health Hub. For more information about your health care benefits, contact your plan sponsor or one of Aetna International's expert sales consultants for group business or individuals and families.

The beat goes on: Move more. Stress less. Live heart-healthy.

Heart-healthy resources hub: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/heart-health-support-resource.html>

Health Hub: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do>

⁹ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/weight-a-silent-heart-risk#:~:text=It's%20long%20been%20known%20that,the%20development%20of%20heart%20problems.>

¹⁰ <https://www.healthline.com/health/heart-disease/exercise#1>

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK525170/>

¹² <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/alcohol-and-heart-health>