

How to Reduce the Risk of Heart Attack

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HOW TO REDUCE THE RISK OF HEART ATTACK by Niru Prasad MD, FAAP, FACEP
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You can reduce the risk of heart attack by following these preventive measures.

1. **Blood Pressure** High blood pressure damages the arteries throughout your body leading to plaque formation which predisposes to heart attack and stroke. High blood pressure can be hereditary for which nothing can be done. However, the risk can be reduced by:
 - a. Limiting alcohol intake
 - b. Reducing salt intake
 - c. weight control
 - d. Reducing stress by exercise and relaxation
 - e. Seeking medical help if blood pressure is over 140/90 on several occasions
2. **Cholesterol Level** A total cholesterol level above 240 with elevated low density lipoprotein increases the risk of heart attack. The high density lipoprotein circulating through the blood vessels prevents clot formation and keeps arteries clear. Some preventive measures to reduce cholesterol are:
 - a. Limiting saturated fat found in meats and dairy products and replacing with monosaturated fat such as canola and olive oils
 - b. Eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, beans and grainIf your cholesterol level is consistently high, seek medical help for cholesterol-reducing medication.
3. **Diabetes** Diabetes, both Type 1 (insulin-dependent) and Type II (non insulin-dependent), predisposes you to heart attack by damaging the arteries. The risk can be reduced by controlling blood sugar with diet control, exercise, weight loss and medications like insulin or hypoglycemic agent.
4. **Smoking** Smoking cigarettes and tobacco causes damage to the blood vessels by constriction and reduces the blood supply to your heart and lungs, increasing the risk of heart attack and lung disease. The risk can be reduced by:
 - a. Quitting smoking
 - b. Seeking medical help if you cannot quit regarding the use of nicotine gum or patches
5. **obesity** Excess weight increases your risk of hypertension, heart attack and diabetes. To reduce the risk:
 - a. Lose weight safely
 - b. Change your eating habits by limiting fat and extra carbohydrate
 - c. Exercise regularly
6. **Exercise** Your heart needs exercise to keep the muscle active and strong. Moderate exercises like regular walking help lose weight faster than occasional heavy workouts. Do exercise on a regular basis.
7. **Alcohol** Excess alcohol consumption increases the risk of heart attack; however, it has been proved that alcohol increases the high density lipoprotein in the blood and inhibits clotting. It is safe to take one or two drinks of alcohol a day. But non-drinkers don't need to start drinking to protect their heart since it can become habit forming!
8. **Hormone Replacement** The post-menopausal woman should take estrogen and progesterone combination to reduce the risk of osteoporosis and heart attack. Taking aspirin (one tablet a day) on a regular basis reduces the risk of heart attack in both men and women.

By controlling these risk factors, you can lead a healthy life and live longer.