Heart Health

Heart Health 101

If you place a hand in the middle of your chest, you'll feel the rhythmic thumping of your heart. Many people think the heart is located on the left side of the chest, but that's because the hollow, muscular organ slightly tips over into that area. In men, the heart weighs in at about 10 to 12 ounces and in women 8 to 9 ounces. Often compared to a tireless machine, the heart beats about 100,000 times each day. But if you're exercising your heart can beat faster, upping the number of beats each day to a little more than 115,000.

The main function of the heart is to pump blood through the body. Each day, this organ, that's roughly the size of a fist, pushes about 10 pints of blood through the blood vessels in the body. When the heart pumps, the organ pushes blood into the lungs to load up on oxygen and then pumps this oxygen-rich blood through arteries in the blood vessels to all other parts of our bodies. Veins in the blood vessels take blood back to the heart so the organ can pump the blood back to the lungs to, once again, pick up oxygen and repeat the cycle.

As the engine that pumps blood to all parts of the body, a healthy heart is crucial to keeping us alive. But many diseases and conditions put your heart's health at risk.

Those conditions include arrhythmia, high cholesterol levels, congenital heart disease, diabetes, heart attack, heart failure, high blood pressure, kidney disease, metabolic syndrome, obesity, peripheral artery disease (PAD) and stroke, among others. Heart disease, in turn, affects the body in many ways and can trigger other conditions, such as cognitive impairment that can lead to Alzheimer's disease.

Today, cardiovascular disease (CVD)—including heart disease and stroke—is the leading cause of death in the United States. That's the bad news. The good news is that most forms of CVD can be treated and prevented.

Whether you've been diagnosed with a form of CVD or are taking steps to reduce your risk of heart problems, the most important thing is to educate yourself. Become informed about heart health and what you can do to minimize the risk factors involved.

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