

# HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living

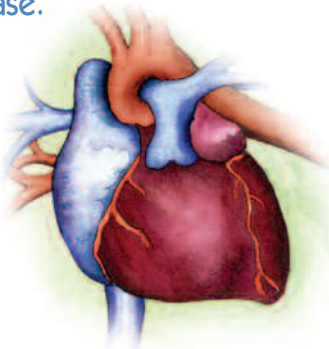


## Your Heart: How It Works and the Risk of Problems

Your heart is a powerful pump. It pumps oxygen (ox-i-jen, part of the air we breathe) and blood all through your body.

You can't live without it! But because it is a pump, your heart can get clogged. It can break down and need to be fixed. That is called heart disease.

If you know how your heart works, you can take better care of your heart. Then, you will be less likely to get heart disease.



### How your heart works:

Your heart is a big muscle. It's the size of your fist, and it has lots of power. Your heart pumps blood from your heart to your feet—and back again—in 20 seconds! Each day, your blood travels about 12,000 miles!<sup>1</sup>

Your heart has four sections or pumps—two little ones and two big ones. They have walls that squeeze and relax. When they squeeze, they push blood out to the rest of your body. When the walls relax, the heart fills with blood. When those pumps have to work too hard, that's high blood pressure.

Blood carries oxygen, and hearts need lots of oxygen. Arteries are tubes that bring fresh blood to your heart and the rest of your body. If your arteries get blocked, blood can't get to your heart. That is a heart attack.

### Who is at risk?

Some people are more likely to have a heart attack than others.

- The older you get, the more likely you are to have high cholesterol (cole-es-ter-all—a waxy film that can build up and clog your blood flow), high blood pressure, diabetes, or stroke. (See the back side for more about these diseases.)
- If your mom, dad, or someone else in your family has heart disease, you are more likely to have it too.<sup>2</sup>

You can't lower these risks by the choices that you make every day.



# Your Heart: How It Works and the Risk of Problems

You make choices every day that can raise the chance that you will get heart disease. But don't worry. You can make changes in how you live so that you have a healthier heart.

## Make changes in how you live for a healthier heart:

Don't smoke

Lose weight or watch your weight

Don't drink alcohol

Eat foods low in fat, eat more fruits and vegetables

Eat less butter, stick margarine, and shortening

Exercise and be active

## High cholesterol causes more serious heart disease:

**High cholesterol**—Too much LDL or “bad” cholesterol builds up in your arteries and blocks them over time. This slows the blood flow and can lead to heart disease. **Talk to your doctor about what your cholesterol level should be.**

**High blood pressure**—Blood pressure is the force of the blood flow against the walls of the arteries. When it is too high, it causes the arteries to become “hard” and increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. **Talk to your doctor about what your blood pressure should be.**

**Diabetes (die-uh-bee-teez)**—When too much sugar stays in the blood, instead of going to the rest of the body, it is called diabetes. It can cause heart disease and other serious problems if it is not controlled. **Your doctor can test you to see if you are at risk.**

**Stroke**—When blood flow to the brain stops or is really blocked, you could have a stroke. This damages the brain and other parts of the body that it controls.

### References

1. Public Broadcasting System. NOVA Online. “Electric Heart.” Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/eheart/>. Accessed April 25, 2007.
2. American Heart Association. “Risk Factors and Coronary Heart Disease.” Available at: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4726>. Accessed April 25, 2007.