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Prevention: personal choices and actions

"No matter how far you have gone on the wrong road, turn back."
Turkish proverb

Good control of blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and other cardiovascular risk factors is the key to reducing risks of heart disease and stroke.

Personal behaviour and lifestyle choices can make a big difference to the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. It is estimated that having a high-risk lifestyle may account for 82% of coronary events in women. Here, we identify personal choices that can lower individual risk for heart disease and stroke. The choices apply to young people and adults alike.

Personal choices in lifestyles and behaviour

- 1 Take moderate physical activity for a total of 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- 2 Avoid tobacco use and exposure to environmental smoke; make plans to quit if you already smoke.
- 3 Choose a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and potassium, and avoid saturated fats and calorie-dense meals.
- 4 Maintain a normal body weight; if you are overweight, lose weight by increasing physical activity and reducing calorie intake.
- 5 Reduce stress at home and at work.

The keys to weight loss are to take in less energy than you expend, and to exercise.

Personal actions for safeguarding cardiovascular health

- 1 Discuss all questions with your health care provider.
- 2 Have regular check-ups from your health care provider.
- 3 Have your blood pressure and levels of blood sugar and cholesterol checked.
- 4 Follow your health care provider's instructions regarding physical activity, nutrition, weight management, and any medications you have been prescribed.
- 5 Know the signs and symptoms of heart attack and stroke and remember that both conditions are medical emergencies.
- 6 Know your blood pressure and cholesterol level, and keep them at the recommended levels through lifestyle changes and by taking any prescribed medication.
- 7 Lower your total fat and saturated fat intake in accordance with your health care provider's instructions.

For people with diabetes, blood pressure control reduces cardiovascular disease significantly more than close control of blood sugar

Talk to your health care provider before taking any drugs, including aspirin, to prevent heart disease and stroke.

Young people

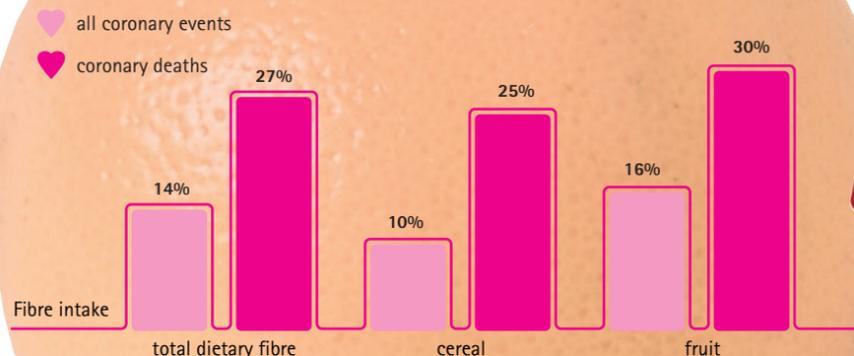
- 1 Actions and choices for children and adolescents with cardiovascular disease, or risk factors, should be discussed with a paediatrician or health care provider.
- 2 Choose a diet containing a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy products, fish, legumes, poultry, and lean meat.
- 3 There is no need to restrict fat intake in children under two years of age.
- 4 For children over two years and adolescents, limit foods high in saturated fats (to less than 10% of daily calorie intake), cholesterol (to less than 300 mg per day), and trans-fatty acids.
- 5 Increase physical activity, and avoid tobacco use or exposure to environmental tobacco smoke.



Healthy living must begin in childhood and youth.

Eat fruit and cereals

Percentage reduction in risk with each daily increment of 10 g of dietary fibre reported 2004



Reducing salt intake from 12 g per day to 3 g per day would reduce strokes by one-third and coronary heart disease by one-quarter.

In the USA, people eat twice as much sugar and fat as recommended.

Burning calories through physical activity is as important as watching what you eat.

In Japan, since the 1970s, the "10 000 Steps Project" has set a national daily exercise goal. To monitor steps walked, the average Japanese family today owns three pedometers.

Compared with less active people, moderately active and highly active individuals have a 20% and 27% respectively lower risk of stroke or stroke death.

People with low fitness are up to six times more likely to develop diabetes and high blood pressure.



The benefits of stopping smoking

Time since last cigarette	Effect
20 minutes	Blood pressure and pulse rate drop to normal.
1 day	Probability of heart attack begins to decrease.
3 months	Circulation improves.
1 year	Excess risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a continuing smoker.
5 to 15 years later	Risk of stroke is reduced to that of people who have never smoked.
15 years later	Risk of coronary heart disease is similar to that of people who have never smoked, and the overall risk of death almost the same, especially if the smoker quits before illness develops.

