

A Healthy Heart for a Healthy You: **A Quick Guide to a Healthy Heart**



You can't live a long and healthy life without a healthy heart. 10,000 deaths per year in Ireland are due to heart disease or stroke.

When you have a healthy heart, your heart can pump blood easily, bringing oxygen and nutrients to all of your cells. With a healthy heart, it is easier to do daily tasks like walking, working, and looking after children.

If your heart is unhealthy, it means that your heart beats at an abnormal pace or that your heart cannot pump your blood easily. If your heart is unhealthy because your arteries are clogged or weak, then your heart cannot get oxygen and nutrients to the rest of your body, which may cause a heart attack or heart disease.

If you are worried about your heart health, call your GP or an emergency medical service immediately.

How do I Keep my Heart Healthy?

1. Do Not Smoke

Smoking is harmful for your health. It causes your arteries to become smaller, less blood to come to your heart, and weakened heart muscles.

If you do smoke and are not ready to quit, you should try to:

- Lower the number of cigarettes you smoke every day,
- Avoid breathing other peoples' smoke,
- Smoke away from other people, and
- Do not smoke in your home or car if you have a child or live with someone else.

If you are ready to quit smoking, there are many ways to get help. You can ask for emotional support from family, talk to your pharmacist, or talk to your GP. You can also call the national smokers' quitline at: 1850201203.

3. Exercise Regularly

Exercising five days per week has many benefits. It keeps your weight healthy, exercises your heart muscles, and keeps your heart strong.

Some easy ways to exercise are to:

- Play a sport,
- Go on a run five days a week,
- Walk for 30 minutes a day, or walk instead of taking public transport, or
- Walk to the grocery store and carry back groceries.

If you haven't been physically active in a long time, start with smaller amounts of exercises. Pay attention to your body, and stop when you need to. Exercising will be hard until you have been exercising regularly for a few weeks.

2. Eat a Healthy Diet

Eating a healthy diet is important because it will help prevent your arteries from becoming clogged.

Do not eat foods with a lot of:

- Saturated fats (like butter, cream, and fatty cuts of meat),
- Trans fats (which are often in fast foods like Chips), and
- Sodium (like in table salt).

Eat foods with things like whole grains (like whole-wheat flour), fruits and vegetables, and low-fat protein (like skinless chicken).

Check food labels to see if they have good or bad ingredients. You can find more lists of foods that you should and should not eat to keep your heart healthy online.

4. Maintain a Healthy Weight

Everyone has a different healthy weight. The right weight for you depends on your:

- Height,
- Gender, and
- The amount of muscle you have.

Being overweight causes many heart problems, especially if you have extra fat around your belly. Belly fat can build up around your organs and clog your arteries. This reduces the amount of blood that gets to your heart, and can cause a heart attack. Belly fat can also cause heart disease and high cholesterol.

You can lose weight through a healthy diet and regular exercise. It is especially important to exercise and build muscle to lose stomach fat. Your GP may also recommend weight loss medications for you.

5. Know your Cholesterol and Blood Pressure

High cholesterol and high blood pressure are both extremely damaging to your heart. They both damage your arteries and can cause heart attacks and heart failure.

Know your cholesterol levels and blood pressure and talk to your GP about how to reduce them if they are too high.

6. Manage your stress.

If you feel a lot of frustration and anxiety, you are probably experiencing stress. Stress can be caused by many things, including problems with work, health, or family. If you are stressed for a long period of time, your arteries can become damaged and your blood pressure can be higher, which is bad for your heart.

To manage stress, you can exercise, talk to others about your feelings including your counsellor and GP, get enough sleep, and take time to relax.