



Understanding matters of the heart can be complex. There can be genetic predispositions for risk, but genetic factors are a small piece of the overall health picture. According to the American Heart Association, only about 20 percent of cardiovascular risk is genetic. It is important to remember that heart health is the sum of many factors including environment, culture and lifestyle.

Lifestyle strategies and healthy habits can promote heart health. The American Heart association promotes Life's Simple 7:

1. Be aware of your blood pressure and manage high blood pressure. Elevated blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.
2. Be aware of your cholesterol levels and control high cholesterol. High cholesterol can clog arteries and lead to heart disease and stroke.
3. Be aware of your blood sugar levels. A lifetime of high levels of blood sugar can damage your heart.
4. Move your body. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood institute recommends physical activity. A well-rounded physical activity program includes safely elevating the heart rate and muscle/bone strengthening activities. Aim for 30-60 minutes each day. Recommended physical activity guidelines for adults:
 - Vigorous-intensity aerobic activity should be included at least 3 days a week
 - Muscle-strengthening activities should be included at least 3 days a week
 - Bone-strengthening activities should be included at least 3 days a week



5. Eat real food, eat better. Experiment with plant-based meals for your heart. Increase fruit, vegetable, beans or other legumes consumption. Higher intake of nutrient dense foods, such as fruits and vegetables, is linked to reduced risk of cardiovascular disease.

6. Lose weight if you are overweight.

7. Stop smoking. Cigarette smokers have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Take notice of your environmental hygiene. If possible, keep safety in mind when you are choosing where to live. A safe community is conducive to healthier living.

Get your sleep. People who do not get enough quality sleep have a higher risk of heart attack.

BONUS TIPS:

Be aware of your stress levels and manage distress. There is currently no evidence to prove managing stress can prevent broken heart syndrome (takotsubo cardiomyopathy), but managing stress or minding your happiness is good for overall wellbeing. Broken heart syndrome can occur when a stressful or emotional or physical event occurs. Broken heart syndrome can mimic a heart attack, see a healthcare provider if you are experiencing heart attack symptoms such as shortness of breath or chest/arm pain. Broken heart syndrome is treatable and the condition usually reverses itself over time.

