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Safeguard Your Heart

Your age-by-age plan for keeping your ticker strong and healthy

The latest findings on heart disease are nothing unexpected: It's the number one killer of American men, claiming a life about every 30 seconds. Most young, fit guys shuffle statistics like these into a mental file titled, "Doesn't apply to me." But no matter how old (or young) you are, the only way to stay on top of your game is to know your risk factors and take the right steps to avoid problems down the road. We talked with two heart experts to find out everything you need to know to guarantee your ticker stays stronger longer.

In Your 20s

"There's a common problem among men in their twenties," says Dr. Eric Topol, M.D., director of Scripps Translational Science Institute. "They don't know they're vulnerable [to heart disease]." Your twenties are the perfect time to establish heart-healthy diet and exercise habits that'll extend your expiration date. That means 30 minutes of exercise five times a week and maintaining a healthy weight and cholesterol level—LDL below 100 mg/dL, HDL of at least 40 mg/dL, and a triglyceride level below 160 mg/dL, according to Dr. Topol.

Every 20-something average Joe needs an annual physical to evaluate HDL and LDL cholesterol, triglycerides, fasting lipid profile, blood pressure, and family history. If the checkup goes well, one appointment is enough to clear your conscience. But if you're an athlete or you hit the weight room more than five times a week, ask your doctor for an echocardiogram to ensure you don't have a heart abnormality," says Dr. John Eleftheriades, M.D., the chief of cardiothoracic surgery at Yale University.

"If you have a silent aneurism (one that doesn't cause you to feel symptoms), you're susceptible to internal splitting of the aorta," Dr. Eleftheriades says. An echocardiogram is the only way to detect this problem. The test also spots dilated cardiomyopathy (a condition of heart failure in which the heart gets stretched too big and too thin) and hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (an inherited condition where the heart muscle is overgrown).

Your 20s Checklist:

30 minutes of exercise five times a week
Annual physicals
Echocardiogram
Cholesterol: LDL less than 100 mg/dL and HDL greater than 40 mg/dL
Blood pressure: 119/79 mm HG or lower
Lipid profile: Triglycerides less than 160 mg/dL



In Your 30s

Although most heart conditions are strongly hereditary, they don't always manifest as early as your twenties, Dr. Eleftheriades said. So along with your standard health check, schedule another echocardiogram 10 years after the first one—especially if you're regularly weight lifting, wrestling, playing football, or participating in any sport with short bursts of activity.

Men older than 35 should also have an electrocardiogram (EKG), which traces the electrical waves of the heart, every 5 years. This test will show evidence of hardening of the heart's arteries (atherosclerosis)—a preventable and treatable condition that restricts blood flow and may cause a blood clot

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Your 30s Checklist:

30 minutes of exercise five times a week
Annual physicals
Echocardiogram, 10 years after the first
Electrocardiogram (EKG), if older than 35
Cholesterol: LDL less than 100 mg/dL and HDL greater than 40 mg/dL
Blood pressure: 119/79 mm HG or lower
Lipid profile: Triglycerides less than 160 mg/dL



In Your 40s

When you hit 40, your doctor should start monitoring the overall degree of inflammation within your body with C-reactive protein (CRP) testing. The higher your CRP level, the higher your risk of cardiovascular disease. But there's no need to make an extra appointment for this one—the same simple blood test that checks your cholesterol levels measures CRP levels. The best way to keep CRP levels in check? Regular exercise.



Your 40s Checklist:

30 minutes of exercise five times a week
Annual physicals
Echocardiogram, 10 years after your last one
EKG, 5 years after your last one
Cholesterol: LDL less than 100 mg/dL and HDL greater than 40 mg/dL
Blood pressure: 119/79 mm HG or lower
Lipid profile: Triglycerides less than 160 mg/dL
C-reactive protein: Less than 1 mg per liter

In Your 50s

Fifty is the typical age men develop coronary heart disease, according to Dr. Topol. The prevention prescription? An exercise stress test. This test, sometimes called a treadmill test, monitors how well your heart handles work. As you walk or pedal on an exercise machine, the electrical activity of your heart and your blood pressure are measured. As your body works harder during the test, it requires more oxygen, so the heart must pump more blood.

The test will pick up subtle arteriosclerosis (blockage of the coronary arteries), and determine the cause of any chest pain and the exercise capacity of your heart.

Your 50s Checklist:

30 minutes of exercise five times a week
Annual physicals
Echocardiogram, 10 years after your last one
EKG, 5 years after your last one
Exercise stress test
Cholesterol: LDL less than 100 mg/dL and HDL greater than 40 mg/dL
Blood pressure: 119/79 mm HG or lower
Lipid profile: Triglycerides less than 160 mg/dL
C-reactive protein: Less than 1 mg per liter



At Every Age

If you experience chest pain or shortness of breath due to exertion, get to the hospital right away. These are the two primary symptoms of heart disease and should never go unchecked. "Men are deniers," Dr. Eleftheriades says. "It's usually someone else in their lives—wife, girlfriend, mom—that forces them to confront symptoms." Other warning signs to speak up about are light-headedness and heart palpitations (an abnormal heart beat).

Source: Abby Lerner, *Your age-by-age plan for keeping your ticker strong and healthy.*

Monotony kills motivation. Here's the opposite of that -- an explosive, weights-free fat-burning workout of changeups and gear shifting that makes you leaner and more athletic. There's very little downtime, "so you'll improve cardiovascular fitness without compromising your strength or muscle," says Robert dos Remedios, C.S.C.S., director of speed, strength, and conditioning at College of the Canyons, in Santa Clarita, California.

Do 10 repetitions of each move, and proceed swiftly from one exercise to the next; your setup should take no more than 10 seconds. Complete all five exercises, rest for 1 to 2 minutes, and repeat the drill. Perform a total of three or four rounds.

Power Skip

Don't worry: This looks much cooler than traditional skipping. You'll propel yourself as high as you can with each skip by driving your knee up into the air. As you punch each knee up, swing your opposite hand upward to get as much vertical lift as possible.

Tuck Jump

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees slightly bent. Jump straight up as high as you can and bring your knees toward your chest. Land on the balls of your feet with your knees slightly bent and quickly go into your next jump.

Squat Jump

Stand with your feet slightly more than shoulder-width apart and your fingers laced behind your head. Bend at the knees to lower yourself until your thighs are parallel to the floor, then jump up as high as you can. Sink directly into the next squat without pausing.

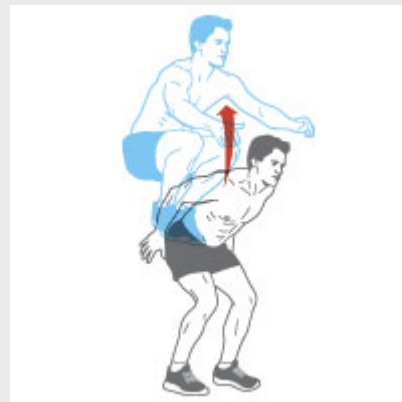
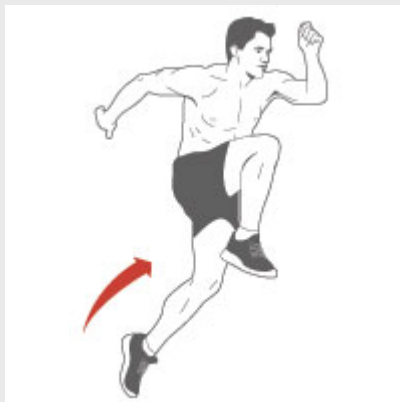
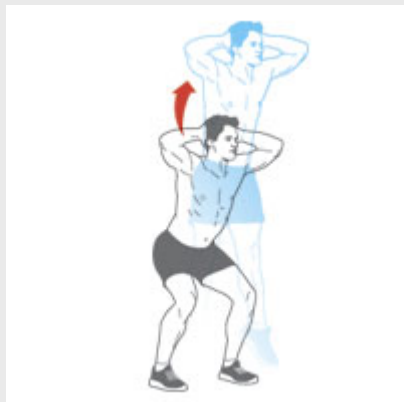
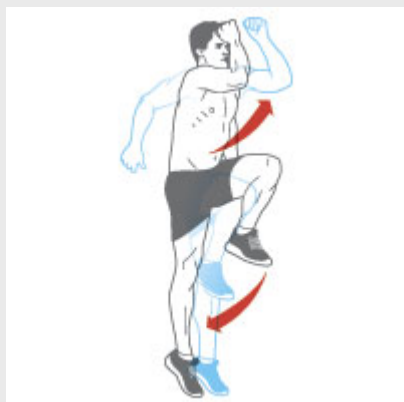
Zigzag Bound

Think about lengthening your stride as much as possible. Drive one leg into the ground to push off forcefully and lift your opposite knee high in the air as you surge forward. Propel yourself upward, forward, and slightly laterally so that you bound forward and to the outside.

Stick Landing

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, hands beside your thighs. Jump and land with your knees bent and your butt and hips back. Try to land on the front two-thirds of your feet, with your heels just off the ground. Hold for 2 seconds before standing to perform your next jump.

Source: Menshealth.com



Go Green

Your guide to building the perfect salad
Done right, a salad can supply fiber, protein, and potent disease-fighting phytonutrients. Done wrong, it's no better than fast food. Turn over a new leaf with these easy suggestions.

Get Raw

Fresh spinach has nearly nine times the bone-building vitamin K of iceberg lettuce. Use at least 2 cups and you'll get some hefty doses of zeaxanthin and lutein to protect your vision as well.

Brighten Up

Brightly colored produce generally serves up the most nutrients. For example, carrots and broccoli contribute beta-carotene (which the body can convert to vitamin A to bolster immunity, eyesight, and skin health) and anticancer compounds. The best salads include a variety of vegetables, such as artichoke hearts, beets, corn, red and green bell peppers, peas, plus lots of tomatoes (an excellent source of vitamin C).

Pile On Freebies

They're not nutritional superstars, but you can't go wrong with cucumbers, mushrooms, celery, or zucchini. They're low cal, and their exceptional water content helps to fill you up.

Skip Sprouts

They may look healthy, but raw alfalfa and mung sprouts have been linked to nearly 40% of recent food-related illnesses.

Skirt The Creamy Stuff

Steer clear of all mayo-based concoctions. Just 1/2 cup of pasta salad runs about 115 calories and 5 grams of fat; potato salad costs you around 180 calories and 10 fat grams. If you must have them, skip the dressing on your green salad.

Pound Protein

Aim for at least 25 grams of high-quality protein, which will help keep you fuller longer. The best salad bar sources include whole egg (7 grams); cottage cheese (7 grams per 1/4 cup); tofu (6 grams per 1.4 ounces); chopped chicken or turkey (11 grams per 1/3 cup); or plain tuna (23 grams per 3 ounces). Avoid using shredded cheese. A cup supplies 28 grams but has more fat than a Big Mac.

Fill Up On Fiber

Although most vegetables are decent fiber sources, beans are the best. Include 1/2 cup of chickpeas (garbanzos) for 5 fiber grams, or get 8 grams with black beans. Three-bean salad is another worthy option.

Go Naked

Toppings like bacon bits, fried chow mein noodles, and croutons are a tease, with few nutrients and lots of calories. Sunflower seeds are the one exception. Two tablespoons (100 calories) provide nearly half your daily quota for vitamin E, necessary for fighting off many forms of cell damage. At 61 calories per 2 tablespoons, raisins are another OK choice—if you can spare the calories.

Change Your Oil

If you have to add some flavor to your vegetables, at least pick the right one. Prepared dressings are loaded with sodium, calories, and fat. Instead, top your salad with one tablespoon of heart-healthy olive oil plus as much red wine or balsamic vinegar as you want.

Get Some On The Side

Man does not live by salad alone, and neither should you. For balance, choose 1 ounce of whole-grain bread to accompany your (now) healthy platter.

Source: Elizabeth M. Ward, M.S., R.D.,
Your guide to building the perfect salad.

Reminder:
BSI Procedures
Personal Protective Equipment