

4 Ways You May Be Hurting Your Heart



To keep your heart healthy, you know to avoid smoking and limit foods with artery-clogging saturated fat, like red meat and butter. But other unhealthy habits aren't so obvious. Here are ways you could be tainting your ticker without realizing it.

1 You're stuck in a walking or jogging rut. Walking and jogging are great for getting your heart rate up. But make sure your fitness routine also includes flexibility exercises, such as yoga or stretching. A *PLOS ONE* study found that those with poor trunk flexibility—meaning they weren't able to reach for their toes very far while sitting—had stiffer arteries than those who were more limber. When you're more flexible, your arteries may be as well, which can reduce your risk for heart disease.

2 You skimp on sleep—or overdo it. Sleeping too little or too much or not sleeping well may also make your arteries stiffer, according to a *Circulation* study. Your best bet: To beat heart disease, aim for seven hours of good-quality sleep each day.

3 You're prone to blowing your stack. If everyday events often set you off, such as long lines or getting stuck in traffic, find ways to tame your temper. A study in *European Heart Journal* found that anger outbursts may trigger heart attack and stroke.

4 You indulge your sweet tooth. Sugary foods, such as regular soft drinks and cookies, may make you smile, but they won't make your heart happy. A study in *JAMA: Internal Medicine* found that those who consumed 17 to 21 percent of their calories from added sugar increased their risk of dying of heart disease by 38 percent. The American Heart Association recommends no more than 25 g of added sugar per day for women and no more 36 g of added sugar per day for men.

Additional source: *Arteriosclerosis and Thrombosis and Vascular*