

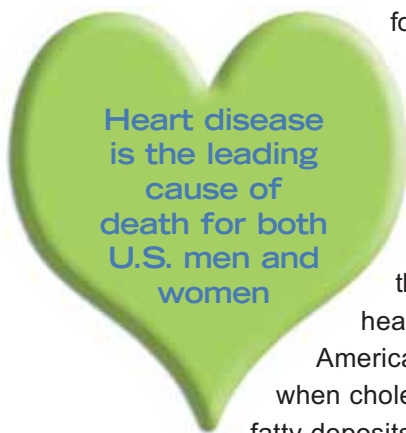
## Playing it smart can lead to a healthier heart

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**O**h, the wondrous human heart. Celebrated in song, praised by poets, captured by lovers, it is one of the most important organs in the human body, but it can also be the deadliest.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both women and men in the United States, killing almost 700,000 Americans each year. Coronary heart disease, the most common heart ailment among Americans, occurs when cholesterol and other fatty deposits clog the arteries feeding blood to the heart. If the blood supply to the heart muscle is cut off, a heart attack can result.

Not a very heartwarming thought, especially when you consider that your ticker, a powerful muscle about the size of your fist, pumps nearly five quarts of blood through your entire body



every 60 seconds for a total of 2,000 gallons a day. Your heart is a workhorse. The best way to thank it is by treating it well, which means adopting heart-smart strategies such as keeping your weight in check, exercising regularly, not smoking, eating a healthy diet and controlling your blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels. Choosing a healthy lifestyle can help you reduce your risk of heart disease, or help you control your heart disease if you're one of the 70 million Americans who has it.

**>> According** to the American Heart Association, all physical activity makes for a healthier heart, and all healthy adults ages 18–65 should be getting at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity five days a week. Considering that the average American watches more than four hours of TV each day, 30 minutes of exercise can bring a return that includes improved cholesterol and blood pressure levels, a healthier weight and increased self-esteem. If you're older than 65, have a chronic health condition or other physical limitations, ask your health care provider for an exercise program that suits you.

**>> When it comes** to heart disease, prevention is key, but the most common mistake people make is waiting until later in life to begin thinking about prevention strategies, says Daniel W. Jones, MD, president of the American Heart Association. Most people don't begin thinking about heart disease until they find out that their blood pressure is elevated, or that their blood cholesterol is high "and there are so many things that can be done to prevent the onset of those risk factors," Jones says. "The best strategies for the prevention of heart disease begin early in life."

For people who already have heart disease, some simple measures, such as getting a flu shot each year, can reduce the risk of dying from heart disease, Jones says.

A heart-to-heart chat with your doctor about four very important numbers can save your life.

"The important numbers for people to know in managing the prevention of heart disease are body mass index, blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose level," Jones says.

Knowing those four numbers can help you and your doctor determine your risks and mark the progress you're making toward a healthier heart. To help you understand what each one means, check out this handy American Heart Association chart: [www.goredforwomen.org/know\\_your\\_numbers/index.html](http://www.goredforwomen.org/know_your_numbers/index.html).

**>> People** may be able to reel in a healthier heart by eating fish at least twice a week. According to the American Heart Association, fish containing omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, sardines and alba-



**Eat your way to health** core tuna, may help lower the risk of death from coronary artery disease. Pregnant women, nursing mothers or children should take special care when eating fish, however, as they can contain high levels of mercury. If you don't eat fish, the American Heart Association recommends eating tofu, soybeans, walnuts, canola oil or flaxseed, as some research has shown they may also have a positive effect on the health of your heart.

**>> For more heart healthy tips, visit** [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org) or [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

### Watch that waistline!

The nation's waistline is expanding. At least 64 percent of Americans are overweight or obese. Those extra pounds might seem like more to love, but they can raise your blood cholesterol level, ramp up your blood pressure and increase your risk of developing diabetes — factors that will raise your risk of a heart attack by about six times.

"Weight control is a critically important strategy for prevention of heart disease," says Daniel W. Jones, MD, president of the American Heart Association.

For a heart-healthy diet, load your plate with veggies and fruits. Choose lean meats and poultry without the skin, and prepare them without adding saturated or trans fats. Also, the fiber in unrefined whole-grain foods can lower your blood cholesterol, make you feel full and keep the scales from tipping.



**>> Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate activity five days a week**



American Public Health Association