

## Vascular health

### Keeping your heart healthy

Your heart has always been there for you – 24/7, 365 days a year. So, isn't it time you started giving some of that love back? Your heart and vascular system need your care.

### The state of the heart

America's hearts and vascular systems are in trouble. Heart disease and stroke are the first and third-leading causes of death in this country.<sup>2</sup> Heart illness causes one in four deaths in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

### As we get older

You're more likely to have vascular problems as you get older.<sup>1</sup> What happens as you age? Plaque and cholesterol build up in your arteries, thickening and stiffening them – leaving less room for blood to flow.

This lower blood flow can cause strokes, aneurysm, and loss of an arm or a leg from loss of blood flow.<sup>4</sup>

**Your vascular system is your body's network of blood vessels, carrying blood to and from the heart – including arteries, capillaries and veins.<sup>1</sup>**

### How is your vascular health?

Given the numbers, we all need to keep an eye on our vascular health. Here are some things that can change your vascular health:<sup>1</sup>

- Family history of vascular or heart diseases
- Having a baby
- Sickness or getting hurt
- Sitting or standing still for a long time
- Any health problem, such as high blood sugar or high cholesterol, that affects the heart and blood vessels
- Smoking
- Being too heavy

Talk to your doctor about what you can do to avoid vascular illness. If needed, you may have to make some minor – or major – changes to your lifestyle.

## The good news

You can make your vascular health better and lower your chance of getting vascular illness. Here's how:

- **Stop smoking.** It's not easy, but you're worth the effort. Tobacco products leave sticky plaque in your veins and arteries. They make it more likely you will have vascular problems. You don't have to quit alone. Reach out to friends, family, doctors and support hotlines resources for help.<sup>5</sup>
- **Eat a healthy, low-fat diet and keep good cholesterol levels.** Stock your fridge with fresh fruits and veggies, low-fat or fat-free milk, and cheese. Control your serving sizes, and read food labels carefully when shopping to avoid foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol.<sup>6</sup>
- **Work out regularly.** This can help you to:
  - Control your weight.
  - Lower your chance of getting cardiovascular illness.
  - Raise your chances of living longer.<sup>7</sup>

With a little thought and a lot of hard work, you can make your and your family's quality of life better – like being there for the big moments.

## Common types of vascular disease

The three most widely found vascular diseases are:<sup>6</sup>

- **Peripheral Arterial Disease.** The outer arteries in the legs become too thin, limiting blood flow to the legs. This can cause:
  - Pain
  - Trouble walking
  - Foot pain while resting, which can make it harder to sleep
  - Sores or infections that won't heal
  - In serious cases, losing an arm or a leg
- **Carotid Artery Disease.** The major arteries leading to the brain in the neck become thick with plaque. This can cause strokes due to the lower blood flow to the brain, or from clots and bits of plaque breaking off and flowing to the brain.
- **Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm.** This happens when the aorta, the largest artery in the body, weakens and begins to bulge. This bulge is called an aneurysm. It may keep getting bigger and rupture if left untreated, causing very bad bleeding in the body and most often causing death.



## Did You Know?

Research has shown that you'll gain about two hours of life for each hour of working out. Even walking counts.<sup>8</sup>

## Resources

To learn more about vascular health and illness prevention, you can visit these websites:

- **American Heart Association:**  
[heart.org](http://heart.org)
- **Cleveland Clinic:**  
[clevelandclinic.org](http://clevelandclinic.org)
- **National Institutes of Health, MedLine Plus:**  
[nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vascular diseases.html](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vascular diseases.html)
- **VascularWeb, Society for Vascular Surgery:**  
[vascularweb.org](http://vascularweb.org)

Visit [anthem.com](http://anthem.com) for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

Sources: (1) U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health, Medline Plus, *Vascular Diseases* (December 2011): [nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vascular diseases.html](http://nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/vascular diseases.html) (2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Leading Causes of Death* (September 2011): [cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/lead.htm](http://cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/lead.htm) (3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Heart Disease Facts* (December 2010): [cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm](http://cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm) (4) The Society for Vascular Surgery, *Five Most Important Things Baby Boomers Can Do To Maintain Good Vascular Health* (March 2010): [vascularweb.org](http://vascularweb.org) (5) The Society for Vascular Surgery, *Smoking Is A Major Risk Factor For Vascular Disease* (January 2011): [vascularweb.org](http://vascularweb.org) (6) The Society for Vascular Surgery, *High Cholesterol Is A Threat To The Entire Vascular System, Not Just Heart Vessels* (March 2010): [vascularweb.org](http://vascularweb.org) (7) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *The Benefits of Physical Activity* (February 2011): [cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/health/#LiveLonger](http://cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/health/#LiveLonger) (8) American Heart Association, *Physical activity improves quality of life* (January 2011): [heart.org](http://heart.org)

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