



The Wellness Watch

February 2020

February is Healthy Heart Month



Cold Weather and the Impact on Your Heart

Whether you live in a frigid climate or not, cold weather can affect your heart. According to the American Heart Association, cold weather and other seasonal factors can raise the risk of heart attacks and more.

Studies show that cardiac deaths begin to climb around Thanksgiving, peak early in the year, then decrease as warmer weather returns. According to a 2015 study, every one degree Celsius drop in temperature (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) corresponded to a 0.49 percent increase in deaths from all causes.

Many factors are at work.

- ◆ The cold makes arteries constrict, which can decrease blood flow and the delivery of oxygen.
- ◆ It tends to increase the formation of blood clots.
- ◆ Winter is also flu season, and studies have shown an increase in heart attacks shortly after people get the flu.



Some other potential factors include:

- ◆ The stress of holidays.
- ◆ A lack of sunshine and an increase in depression.
- ◆ Less exercise in the colder, darker months.

For those with coronary conditions, it's especially important to be aware of cold-weather activities like shoveling snow. Consider hiring someone to do it or using a snow blower, particularly if you're not in shape, and to dress warmly. And of course, eat a healthy diet.



Cardiology Moves Forward for 2020

In recognition of American Heart Month, here are some cardiovascular research developments to keep an eye on in 2020, courtesy of Harvard Health Publishing:

- ◆ **Digital stethoscopes.** Specialized microphones and sensors filter and amplify sounds from the heart. The sounds are then converted to a digital signal sent wirelessly to a smartphone or tablet. There, the patterns can be viewed and further analyzed. 
- ◆ **Safer anti-clotting treatments.** A chip the size of a postage stamp containing miniature channels, valves, processors, and pumps enables precise adjustments of different fluids (ie. medications and blood components).
- ◆ **New ways to lower cholesterol.** An injectable drug called Inclisiran requires just two injections a year and may cut LDL (the "bad" cholesterol) in half. Another new drug (bempedoic acid), taken in pill form, can lower LDL by about 25 percent in people who can't tolerate high doses of statins.
- ◆ **Cuff-less blood pressure monitor.** A small skin patch measures light absorbed or reflected by blood vessels. Paired with a special smartwatch, it continuously measures a person's heart rate and oxygen level in addition to blood pressure. 
- ◆ **Handheld ultrasound.** Miniaturized ultrasound devices that are plugged into a smartphone or tablet, providing images that can detect problems with the aorta or the heart valves and also determine the severity of heart failure. Though they won't replace standard echocardiograms, the goal is faster diagnosis and treatment of common heart problems.

What to do if You Catch a Cold or the Flu

You did what you could to avoid getting sick. But your throat is sore, your nose is stuffed, you're achy. Now what?

"First, reduce the harm to other people," says Bruce Barrett, professor of family medicine and community health at the University of Wisconsin. "Wash your hands regularly, maybe wear a mask, and don't go to work while you're sick."



Since colds and the flu are caused by viruses, antibiotics (which kill bacteria) won't help. And taking them could up the odds that bacteria will become resistant to the drugs when we need them.

If you have the flu and you're over 65 or have a higher risk of complications, your doctor may prescribe an anti-viral drug. But you have to start taking them within the first two days of feeling sick. And they'll only lessen the duration of the flu by about a day. Otherwise, all you can do is treat the symptoms.



Rest. When you feel like lying on the couch, do it. The urge to rest is brought on by inflammatory cytokines—proteins that the immune system makes when it's fighting off a bug. It is thought that the cytokines act on the brain to make you feel tired so that your immune system has more energy to fight off the virus.

Stay hydrated. Fluids are thought to help loosen mucus and replace the water lost if a fever makes you sweat.

Over the counter drugs. "I tend to dissuade people from using over-the-counter combination cold formulas that contain some mixture of antihistamines, cough suppressants, decongestants, and pain relievers," says Barrett. Why? Because you may not need them all, and they may have side effects. For example, antihistamines and cough suppressants can cause dizziness and drowsiness, and decongestants can cause insomnia. If you take them at all, use products that treat only the symptoms that are causing you problems.

Fever. "You won't shorten the illness by lowering your fever," says Barrett. So if you want to treat a fever, aches, or a headache, he suggests acetaminophen (Tylenol). "It doesn't cause stomach ulcers or kidney problems like ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin can." But don't take more than 3,000 mg a day of acetaminophen. More can damage the liver.

How to Survive a Fall



Everyone falls, with one in four Americans over the age of 65 falling each year. In the winter, falls on ice and snow are common. It happens in a split second and before you know it, you're on the ground.

Some people fall all the time — on purpose. Paratroopers, football players, and stunt people all get paid to fall and they know how to do it.

Can we learn anything from a professional fall guy? Yes! They don't resist when they know they are going down. They relax, go limp, and try to roll as they ease themselves down with arms bent.

You can actually learn how to fall better and suffer fewer injuries. Here are some things to keep in mind if you slip or trip.

1. Don't try to stop yourself with an outstretched arm. You'll likely end up with a broken arm or wrist. Instead, keep your arms bent.
2. Roll with the fall. Notice how football players roll across the field when they are hit. They don't try to stop themselves from falling. They roll.
3. Turn so that you land on your thighs or butt. Lots of cushioning there and better than landing on bone.
4. If you are losing your balance, get ready to fall by bending your elbows and knees.
5. If you feel yourself falling forward, turn your head to the side. Falling backward, tuck your chin to your chest.

Prevention is important too. Wear boots with non-slip tread when it is icy outside.

