



# HEART SMART AT EVERY AGE

Heart disease is the number one health risk for Aussie women. But don't let that scare you - 90% of heart attacks and strokes can be prevented. Different age brackets call for different steps. Here is how to reduce your own risk factors

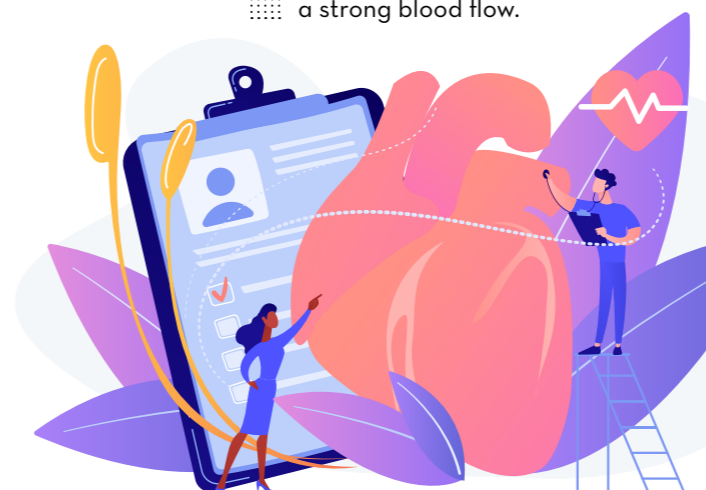
## 20s-30s

IN YOUR

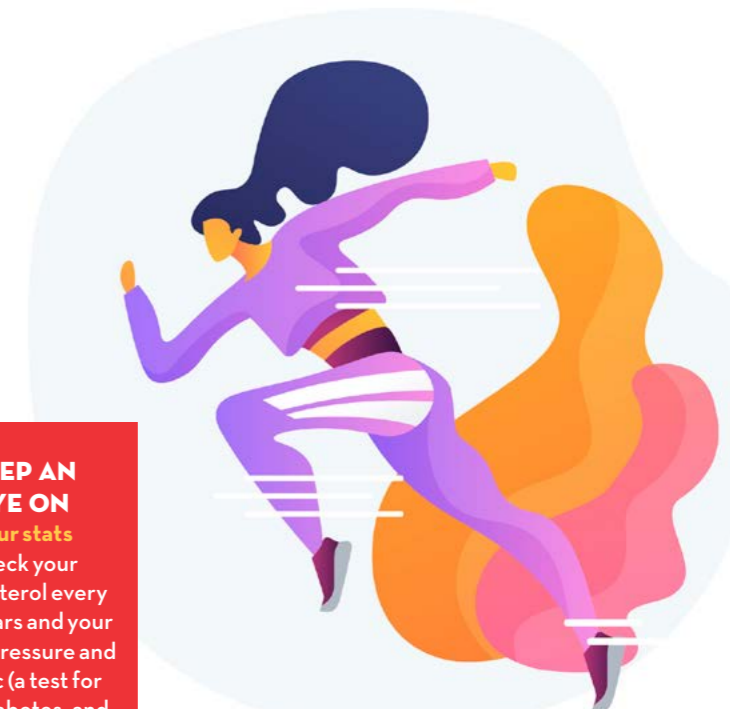
Now is the time to talk to your doctor about what your heart disease risk factors might be, take a look at your exercise, eating and lifestyle habits, and make any tweaks needed. The younger you are when you establish good habits, the easier it is to stick to them.

### YOUR ADVANTAGES

- **Lots of energy** Make use of it and exercise regularly. Keeping active aids your heart by helping to keep cholesterol and blood pressure low. Aim for a combination of cardio and resistance training. The former strengthens your heart while the latter builds muscle, increasing your calorie burn (even at rest) and reducing weight gain, which raises the risk of heart attack and stroke.
- **Hormones** You have a good supply of oestrogen, which helps to increase your HDL (good cholesterol), reduce your LDL (bad cholesterol) and relax your blood vessels to maintain a strong blood flow.



STAYING HEALTHY IS CRUCIAL, BUT DON'T JUST ASSUME ALL IS WELL WITH YOUR HEART. STAY SAFE AND HAVE IT CHECKED. THE MORE YOU KNOW THE BETTER OFF YOU'LL BE!



### KEEP AN EYE ON

#### Your stats

Check your cholesterol every five years and your blood pressure and HbA1c (a test for pre-diabetes, and diabetes, which impacts heart health) every two years, so your doctor can monitor these risk factors.

#### Pregnancy

If you suffer from any complications, such as gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia or eclampsia, your chances of future heart problems increase and your doctor should monitor you.

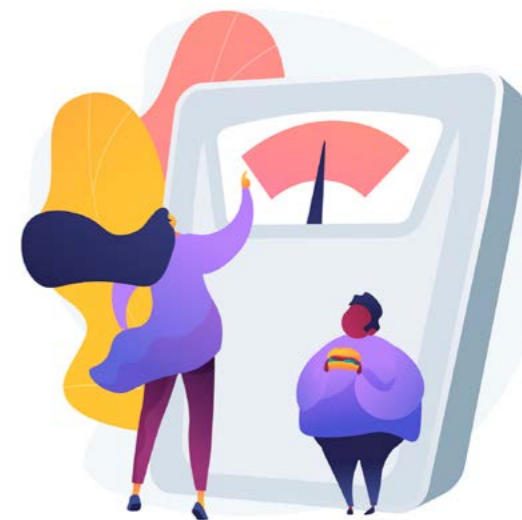
#### Family history

If a parent or sibling has heart disease by age 55 for men and age 65 for women, your risk increases.

#### Drinking

A daily 100ml of red wine can positively affect cholesterol, but more than that on a regular basis can raise blood pressure.

PART OF LIVING YOUR BEST LIFE IS BEING ACTIVE. BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN DAILY MARATHONS - JUST FIND A PHYSICAL PURSUIT YOU ENJOY AND STICK WITH IT



### THE RIGHT SIZE

A LARGE WAIST HAS BEEN LINKED TO A HIGHER RISK OF HEART DISEASE FOR MEN AND WOMEN

# IN YOUR 40s

It's all about hormones. As you enter perimenopause, oestrogen levels drop, so you have less of its protective effects. Now's a good time to talk to your doctor and get the inside word on how your hormones are tracking.

## YOUR ADVANTAGES

• **Metabolism** Use this window when your metabolism is pretty strong to get your eating habits in order. Healthy eating now helps to offset a slowing metabolism later. A favourite eating plan of cardiologists is The Mediterranean Diet, which is plant-based with lots of brightly coloured produce (especially green leafy vegetables), beans, whole grains, healthy fats, nuts and seeds, and fish (aim for twice a week). Lean protein (chicken, turkey) is also recommended, and lean pork and beef are OK in moderation.

### KEEP AN EYE ON

#### Your waist

For women, a waist measurement of 88cm or more has been associated with an increased risk of heart disease. For men it's 102cm. Reduce your middle with a diet plan and high-intensity training twice a week. It can jump-start weight loss and help condition your heart. Try alternating three minutes of walking with two minutes of running for a total of 20 minutes, and combine it with strength training twice a week.

#### Blood sugar

Middle age is when your risk for type 2 diabetes goes up. High blood sugar leads to

hardening of the arteries. Get your blood sugar tested as part of your annual check-up; if your numbers creep up, make exercise and diet changes to reverse the trend.

#### Cholesterol

Perimenopause and menopause can increase LDL cholesterol and decrease HDL's protective benefits. Exercise is your friend. It raises your HDL, and the more HDL, the more protection you have. Aim for 150 minutes of exercise weekly, but change it up from time to time to keep your heart challenged. If you've always been a walker, walk faster, tackle an

incline, or work in a few minutes of jogging.

#### Stress

You may feel the pressure of juggling work, family and even taking care of your parents. Research has shown uncontrolled anxiety (and also depression) can be an underlying cause of heart disease - in part by raising levels of cortisol, which enhances the build-up of plaque in your arteries. You might not be able to control when tension hits, but you can lessen the damage by weaving stress relief into your schedule, whether it's listening to music, practicing deep breathing or doing yoga or meditation.



### KEEP AN EYE ON

#### Sleep

Adults who net fewer than six hours per night can be more at risk for heart disease than those who log six to eight hours. If menopause-related night sweats are part of the issue, keeping your bedroom at 20°C or lower can help. If you have regular fatigue during the day and snore, you may want to be checked for sleep apnea.

#### Immunisations

When you're older, having the flu can raise your risk of heart issues because it can affect your blood pressure and heart rate. So get an annual flu shot. Adults aged 70 or older should also talk to their doctor about a pneumonia vaccination.

#### Vitamin D

More research is pointing to vitamin D deficiency as a factor in heart disease, and people don't synthesise D as easily as they age. Get your D levels checked yearly.



### KNOW THE SIGNS

Heart attack symptoms can be different for women.

Although chest pain is a main sign for both males and females, women are more likely to experience the following.

- Pain in the shoulders, neck, jaw, upper back or arms.
- Unexplained dizziness, light-headedness or fainting, sometimes accompanied by palpitations.
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing without chest discomfort.
- Clammy sweating that feels like sweating when you're stressed.
- Stomach pain, abdominal pressure or nausea.
- Unusual weakness, fatigue or an inability to perform simple activities.

If you or someone you know has these symptoms, call 000 and say, 'I think I am having a heart attack' so the ambulance comes prepared. ■

# IN YOUR 50s, 60s AND BEYOND

Women's risk for heart disease goes up in menopause and begins to match that of men. So it's especially important to keep the heart health conversation going with your doctor at your yearly check-up. Also watch out for symptoms such as feeling unusually tired, and shortness of breath during daily activities.

## YOUR ADVANTAGES

• **More time** Put it to good use on both things you love and things to help. At home, that could mean lots of garden time. For outreach, meanwhile, research shows over 50s who regularly volunteer are less likely to get high blood pressure, a contributor to heart disease, stroke and premature death.



**RED FEB** With Heart Research Australia identifying heart disease as the single biggest cause of death in Australia, the organisation is inviting Australians during February to wear red and raise both awareness and funds for lifesaving research to help keep families together for longer. Visit [heartresearch.com.au/redfeb](http://heartresearch.com.au/redfeb).



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