

## Your Heart Matters-Take Time to Take Care of It

### Cardiovascular Disease Claims Hundreds of Thousands of Americans' Lives Annually

February is the perfect time to take care of affairs of the heart - heart health, that is.

The [American Heart Association](#) devotes itself each February to educating the public about cardiovascular disease, the number one cause of death worldwide. In 2011 alone, approximately 787,000 Americans died from cardiovascular disease, which encompasses heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.

It's important to understand the factors that contribute to this global killer. The World Heart Federation says even people in good health can be vulnerable to heart disease, due to [risk factors](#) beyond their control such as age, family history and ethnicity. People of African or Asian descent are at higher risks of developing cardiovascular disease than other groups, according to the World Heart Federation.

To take control of your health and reduce risks caused by lifestyle, the American Heart Association suggests adopting these "[Simple 7](#)" tips:

1. Control cholesterol
2. Eat Better
3. Reduce blood sugar
4. Manage blood pressure
5. Stop smoking
6. Lose weight
7. Get active

Many of the Simple 7 focus on exercise and diet. While it's important to move more, eat less and make good choices, life has a habit of getting in the way of good intentions. When the day is packed with work, errands and household chores, it may seem impossible to squeeze in a workout.

Fortunately, the American Heart Association has developed some clever ideas to sneak exercise into your daily routine:

- Jump on the treadmill while watching TV. This is a double win - you're exercising and, while you're on the treadmill, you won't be tempted to snack on junk food.
- Skip the elevator and use the stairs - consider the extra few minutes an investment in your health.
- Going shopping? Park farther from the store. It's good for your heart and saves gas.



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While factors like age, family history and ethnicity can make some people more vulnerable to heart disease, simple steps like managing blood pressure and being active can help reduce risks.

- Encourage family play time, but trade electronics or board games for activities like tag that are literally a breath of fresh air.

And while progress is being made (heart disease death rates dropped about 39 percent from 2001 to 2011), the American Heart Association notes that 85.6 million Americans are suffering from some type of cardiovascular disease or the after-effects of stroke.

To better understand risk factors, there are tools to assess the likelihood of getting cardiovascular disease. The American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology offer downloadable Smartphone apps, and an [online assessment](#) called My Life Check is available from the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association.