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"The greatest wealth is health." ~Virgil

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8 Sneaky Habits That Sabotage Your Heart

Everyday Factors That Can Harm Your Heart

-- By Jennipher Walters, Health and Fitness Writer

We all know that for optimum heart health we need to eat a healthy diet, exercise and not smoke. But did you know that the little things you do every day can have a big impact on the most important muscle in your body?

We put together a list of the eight habits that may be hurting your heart. You might be surprised how these "little" things add up! Are you guilty of any of these seemingly innocent mistakes?

1. You fly off the handle. Do you suffer from regular bouts of rage or intense anger at home, at work or in traffic? If so, your angry temperament may be hurting more than the people around you. While moderate anger can be a good way to release tension, explosive anger or chronic bouts of rage can increase your risk of heart disease.

A 2000 study published in the journal *Circulation* found that among almost 13,000 middle-aged African-American and white men and women with normal blood pressure, those who were the angriest had almost twice the risk of coronary artery disease and three times the risk of heart attack when compared to those with the lowest levels of anger. Researchers note that while anger can harm your heart, anxiety and other negative emotions probably also play a role. Anger and anxiety have been shown to increase blood pressure, disrupt the electrical impulses of the heart and possibly speed up the process of atherosclerosis, a fatty build up in the arteries.

2. You sleep too much (or too little). Getting fewer than five—or more than nine—hours of sleep a night can hurt your heart because both extremes elevate blood pressure and levels of stress hormones. In fact, the Nurses' Health Study of more than 71,000 women, ages 45 to 65, found that sleeping five or fewer hours each night increased the risk of coronary disease by a whopping 45%. Those who regularly slept nine or more hours had a 38% greater risk than those who slept eight hours—even after taking snoring and smoking in account.

3. You don't floss regularly. You may think that regular flossing just helps keep your pearly whites in tip-top shape, but research shows that dental disease and cardiac health are correlated. Researchers believe that inflammation from gum disease allows bacteria to enter your mouth's blood vessels, travel into the coronary artery vessels, and narrow their passages. This reduces blood flow, which hurts the heart. In fact, people with coronary artery disease are 38% more likely to also have gum disease. While research is still being done in this area, it's best to keep that mouth healthy!



You put off going to the doctor.



You have more than one drink a night.



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4. You see the glass as half empty. Looking on the bright side isn't just about improving your mental state; it's also a boon to your heart. In a groundbreaking 2009 issue of the American Heart Association journal *Circulation*, researchers found that not only did optimism seem to protect against heart disease and death but also that pessimism seemed to increase the risk. Furthermore, subjects with the highest degree of hostility and cynicism were also more likely to die from all causes than those who had more upbeat attitudes. Pessimists were more likely than optimists to have diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and suffer from depression (which has also been linked to poor heart health). Cynics are also more likely to be overweight, smoke and avoid exercise. All reason to start focusing on what's good in life, right?

5. You put off going to the doctor. Access to quality health care is an important factor for heart health, but you have to take advantage of it. That means always going to the doctor when you have an unusual symptom, and updating your medical records when your family history changes. Women should also be sure to alert their doctors to any changes in their menstrual periods, as certain conditions (such as polycystic ovary syndrome) can increase the risk of heart disease. In addition, regular check-ups and annual blood work can help you to better monitor medications and help you to track your weight, cholesterol, blood pressure and other important heart-healthy markers.

6. You have more than one drink a night. While light drinking may be beneficial for the heart, heavy drinking has the opposite effect. Drinking too much alcohol can raise your triglycerides and it can lead to high blood pressure, heart failure and an increased calorie intake, which increases the risk of diabetes and obesity. In addition, excessive drinking and binge drinking can lead to stroke and other serious problems including cardiomyopathy, cardiac arrhythmia and sudden cardiac death, according to the American Heart Association (AHA).

7. You live or work in an area with polluted air. You probably know that smog is linked with respiratory problems and lung disease, but did you also know that breathing in smoggy air can cause hardening of the arteries over the long term? A February 2005 study in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* found that the longer healthy men and women in Los Angeles were exposed to air polluted with fine particulate matter, the thicker carotid arteries became. The carotid artery carries blood from the heart to the head and neck, and a thickening of the arterial walls over time is a major risk factor for fatal heart attacks and strokes. More recent studies have confirmed smog's link to heart problems, including recent studies published in *American Journal of Epidemiology* and *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*.

8. You think secondhand smoke is no big deal. While the association between tobacco use and heart disease is undeniable, did you know that secondhand smoke also harm your heart? A May 1997 report in *Circulation* found that constant exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace or at home nearly *doubled* a person's risk of having a heart attack. Additionally, in 1992 the American Heart Association's Council on Cardiopulmonary and Critical Care concluded that environmental tobacco smoke is a major preventable cause of cardiovascular disease and death, and that secondhand smoke should be treated as an environmental toxin to public health. No mincing of words there.

"The... patient should be made to understand that he or she must take charge of his own life. Don't take your body to the doctor as if he were a repair shop." ~Quentin Regestein

"There ain't much fun in medicine, but there's a heck of a lot of medicine in fun."

"The groundwork of all happiness is good health."