

# Heart health: The daily choices that make a difference



The human heart beats around 100,000 times each day, moving blood to every part of the body. The heart is a majestic organ that has been beating in each one of us since we were just six-week-old embryos. This vital organ is worth every effort one can make to keep it health and working at its best. Heart diseases are the leading causes of death globally. In Africa, it is estimated that 20 million deaths annually are caused by heart diseases. "Heart health" describes lifestyle habits that are aimed at lowering one's risk of developing heart disease.

The following daily considerations have been proven to improve overall cardiovascular health:

### Get enough sleep

A good night's rest keeps the heart working as it should by helping to keep the blood pressure controlled. Prioritise sleep by aiming to get 7-9 hours each night. Employ a wind down routine that allows the mind to settle before bedtime.



### Eat better

Foods that are high in salt, added sugar and saturated fats have been shown to increase the risk of heart disease. Eating a balanced diet can give you the freedom to eat foods that you enjoy in moderation. Read food packaging to educate yourself about what is in your food. Examples of heart healthy foods include fatty fish, green leafy veggies, avocados, berries, wholegrain carbohydrates and olive oil. Try out new recipes to keep your meals exciting.



### Maintain a healthy weight

Increased body fat, especially around the waistline, can directly impact the functioning of vital body organs. Increased weight is also linked to high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes - all of which can result in a heart attack.



### Be more active

Exercises that increase the heart rate can improve heart health. Adults should aim for 45 minutes of exercise, three to five times a week. Do varied exercises such as cardio and strength training. Even moving the body for 10 minutes a day can be beneficial.



### Stop smoking

All types of smoking, even small amounts can be harmful to the heart. The chemicals inhaled during smoking are toxic. They cause damage to blood vessels and that can affect their functioning. This makes one more susceptible to cardiovascular diseases.



### Manage stress

During times of stress the body releases hormones such as cortisone and adrenalin. These are the hormones responsible for helping one respond to stressful or dangerous situations. Over long periods of time, these hormones cause a cascade of events that can be harmful to one's health. Managing stress is an important part of our daily lives. Prayer, mediation, grounding and learning stress-management skills can be of great benefit.



### Control blood pressure

Blood pressure is the measurement of the force within the blood vessels. When this pressure is high, the heart must work harder to move blood around the body. Much like lifting weights. This can result in a heart that becomes stiff. The high pressures can also cause blood vessels to rupture. High blood pressure is pain free, that's why it can go unnoticed while it causes harm to the body.



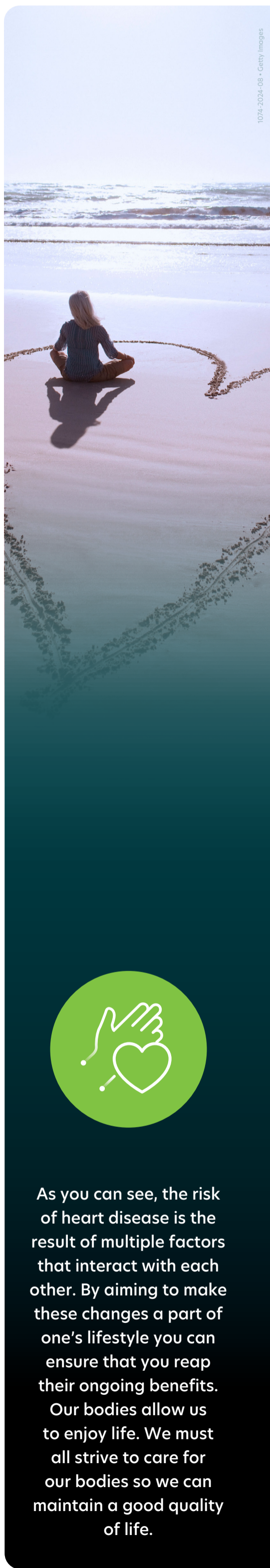
### Keep a low cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that is used in the body for various reasons. When cholesterol levels are high, they are deposited around the blood vessels as plaques. These plaques lessen the diameter of the blood vessels and this can block the flow of blood to organs in the body. The plaques can also break off and cause a blockage of blood vessels elsewhere in the body, resulting in stroke or heart attack.



### Manage blood sugar

High blood sugar is diabetes. This condition affects heart health by causing damage to the blood vessels. This also drives the formation of plaques over the damaged areas. Those with diabetes have twice the risk of having a heart attack. This, amongst other reasons, is why it is important to keep blood sugar well controlled.



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As you can see, the risk of heart disease is the result of multiple factors that interact with each other. By aiming to make these changes a part of one's lifestyle you can ensure that you reap their ongoing benefits. Our bodies allow us to enjoy life. We must all strive to care for our bodies so we can maintain a good quality of life.