

Achieve

▶ YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE

A New Future With Coronary Artery Disease Starts Here



Welcome to the AvMed Disease Management Program's new newsletter, *Achieve*. We've designed it specifically for our Members who are living with coronary artery disease (CAD), and our goal is simple: to bring you expert-approved strategies that help you not only manage your condition, but also help you achieve your optimal health.

Each quarterly issue will deliver condition-specific articles with plenty of support for the rest of your life, from eating well, to moving more, to reducing stress.

And no matter where you are in your CAD journey, AvMed's Disease Management team — staffed with registered nurses, care

advocates and a dietitian — can guide you every step of the way. Whether you need help making doctor's appointments, managing your medications or finding local resources, your care team is just a phone call or email away.

To speak with a Case Manager, please call **1-833-609-0735** or email us at **DM@avmed.org**. We are honored to be your partner in health care.

Sincerely,

Robert Bonnell, M.D.
AvMed Medical Director

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Everyday Habits That Help Keep Your Heart Healthy

You don't need to overhaul your whole life to make a difference in your heart health. These little changes can add up to big benefits.



Your heart pumps every minute of every day. And in most cases, it's something you don't have to think much about. But you might want to give this hard worker a little more thought: Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., so it pays to support your heart health as much as possible.

Fortunately, there are some simple changes you can make to improve how your heart functions, starting with these:

Find a Relaxing Hobby

When you're under stress, it can be tough to keep up with heart-healthy habits. Things like making

good-for-you meals, exercising and getting enough rest take a back seat. But stressful times are exactly when you need those healthy habits the most. Ongoing stress can raise your blood pressure. High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease and a major contributor to heart attacks and strokes.

Activities that keep both your hands and mind busy can help

you relax. Examples include painting, knitting, woodworking, playing chess and doing crossword puzzles. Try spending 15 minutes each day involved in a hobby or a project that you really enjoy.

Get Your Heart Pumping

The heart is a muscle, so working out makes it stronger. "Do something that gets your heart rate up for at least 20 minutes at a time," says cardiologist Stephanie Coulter, M.D., an assistant medical director at the Texas Heart Institute in Houston.

That doesn't mean you have to hit the gym. You can weed for 20 minutes in the garden, walk around the neighborhood, dance in your living room or go for a bike ride. Getting regular exercise benefits your whole body in many ways. It helps lower blood pressure and risk of stroke. It also improves mental health and helps fend off excess weight gain.

Focus on Fiber

Having healthy cholesterol levels can help prevent heart attack and stroke. And eating more high-fiber foods like fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains can

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help you reach your goal. The reason? Fiber can help lower your LDL cholesterol, the “bad” kind that can lead to heart disease. Women should aim for 21 to 25 grams of fiber per day, while men should aim for 30 to 38 grams.

Eat More Slowly

You probably know that being overweight raises your risk for diabetes and high blood pressure, two risk factors for heart disease. Excess weight can also directly injure the heart. Scientists have linked obesity with high levels of troponin. This enzyme is released by heart muscle cells when they’re damaged.

One way to avoid overeating is to simply take your time at each meal. It can take up to 20 minutes to know you’re full. Eating slowly gives your brain a chance to catch up to your stomach.

Subtract Sugar

Sugar is in almost everything we eat. But too much added sugar — the kind that’s not naturally found in food — can raise your risk of dying from heart disease, according to a study in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

To cut back, you can make the biggest dent by avoiding top sources in the American diet. The sugar in these four categories make up more than half of the added sugar consumed in the U.S.:

- Sugary beverages (especially soda)
- Desserts and sweet snacks like doughnuts and pastries
- Coffee and tea (unless it’s black)
- Candy

Instead, drink 64 ounces of water per day, choose low-fat or nonfat dairy, and opt for lower-sugar dessert options.

3 Top Questions About Statins

High cholesterol and heart disease often go together. And if you have both, your doctor may prescribe a statin. These medications lower cholesterol levels and help reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes. But starting a new medicine can also mean lots of new questions. We’ve got answers to some of the most common:

Q My friend had a lot of muscle pain with her statin. Will that happen to me?

A It’s possible. Nearly one-third of patients taking a statin may experience some muscle pain, says Alyssa M. Wozniak, Pharm.D., a clinical assistant professor at the D’Youville School of Pharmacy in Buffalo, New York.

If you have muscle pain that your doctor thinks may be caused by your statin, they may lower your dose or switch you to a different one. You might even be advised to stop the statin for a while, Wozniak says. Don’t stop taking it without talking to your doctor first, though.

Q What can I do to get the most benefit, and how soon will it start working?

A Be sure to take the statin when you’re told to by your doctor, Wozniak says. Some statins, such as simvastatin (Zocor®), work better if you take them at night, she says.

“You may want to take this one with the evening meal or at bedtime,” she says. “However, this is not the case with all statins, so

ask your doctor or pharmacist.” Statins do not need to be taken with food, but they do need to be taken every day, Wozniak explains.

They typically start to work within a week, but the maximum effect takes about a month, she says.

“The doctor usually won’t check your cholesterol again until you have been on a statin for four to 12 weeks in order to give it time to work,” Wozniak says.

Q Are there any foods that I should avoid when taking a statin?

A Most statins can be taken with or without food.

“Grapefruit is one exception. There’s an interaction between grapefruit and statins that we



tend to counsel people on,” Wozniak says. “In general, you would need to drink a large quantity of grapefruit juice for it to be a problem.”

But for certain statins, like simvastatin, grapefruit juice should be avoided, she says. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist to make sure.

▶ **YOUR HEALTHIEST LIFE WITH CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE**

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Emergency department

If you suspect a heart attack or stroke, or have uncontrollable bleeding or trouble breathing, don't wait: Call 911 or go to the ER.