- Heart diseases

Tips on how to lower the risk of heart disease

Don’t be a casualty of a holiday heart attack

Manila Bulletin · 10 Dec 2025 · B-7 · HEALTHY EVER AFTER CHESHIRE QUE, RND, RN, RD cheshireque@gmail.com

The holiday season is not always merry. It is also the season when cases of Christmas coronary artery disease and unhappy New Year heart attacks happen. There are several factors that could precipitate heart attacks, and they are all lifestyle-related. Overindulgence in the consumption of fatty food, sugar, salt, and total excess in calorie intake, changes in daily routine that include no exercise and lack of good quality sleep, drinking of alcoholic beverages, and added stress. and the cold weather, which constricts blood vessels, can all contribute to abnormal elevations in blood pressure and clogging of arteries that lead to decreased blood flow to the heart, thus, causing a heart attack or, if the blood flow to the brain is impeded, a stroke, also known as brain attack.



A heart attack often comes as a surprise, but it should not because there are early signs and symptoms that people often ignore. The common signs of an impending heart attack may differ in terms of severity, as some may only experience mild symptoms. These are fatigue, lightheadedness, nausea, heartburn, indigestion, and a pain that radiates anywhere from the shoulder, arms, jaw, neck, teeth, upper abdomen, and chest. Chest pain is characterized by pressure and tightness that could also feel like something is squeezing the heart. These signs must never be ignored or taken lightly. Check your blood pressure, and if it is beyond 120/80 mmhg at rest, you have to go seek medical attention.

Have two to five cups of green tea per day to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Unfortunately, there are some individuals who do not experience any signs or symptoms prior to having a heart attack. That is why it is important to have a regular check-up of blood lipids, cholesterol, and triglycerides, and blood pressure monitoring for early intervention. A heart attack is a result of the partial or total blockage of arteries that prevent efficient blood circulation. When the heart is deprived of blood and oxygen, cells die. Thus, myocardial infarction or heart attack is inevitable. Diet, sedentary lifestyle, stress, alcohol consumption, and smoking can all negatively impact cholesterol and blood pressure. It is crucial to keep blood pressure and blood lipids at bay to prevent a heart attack.

This holiday season, here are some practical tips to lower your risk of a heart attack:

Listen to your body

Rest if you feel tired. Do not allow yourself to be pressured to attend gatherings if you are unwell. Go seek medical attention immediately. Take your prescribed medications. Set alarms if you have the tendency to forget taking medications during the busy season. It is not just physical exhaustion that could harm your heart. Mental and emotional stress, including those that are influenced by having to socialize with negative people, must be avoided. Health takes priority over keeping up appearances.

Practice portion control at all times

Christmas is not the season for indulgence. It is the season to be thankful that Jesus came to save all mankind. To celebrate the love that we have received from Him and to shower that love not only on the people around us but also on ourselves. Taking care of our health is self-love. Whenever you indulge in food that is not life-giving, you are unloving of yourself. Whenever you eat life-giving food like vegetables and fruits, you are loving yourself. Even mindfully keeping yourself hydrated with water throughout the day is an act of self-love. During parties, spend more time socializing, be it in a big or small group, instead of focusing on savoring everything on the Christmas spread. The goal is to get nourishment, not indulge in large portions.

Take functional food every day

There are plant foods that have benefits for heart health beyond basic nutrition. These plant foods have phytochemicals or phytonutrients and antioxidants that help dilate blood vessels to prevent high blood pressure and also prevent the formation of plaques that clog up arteries. These food items must be part and parcel of your diet:

Green tea and matcha: Backed up by numerous studies for decades, green tea and matcha have catechins that have protective properties for the blood vessels. These catechins reduce inflammation in the arteries and lower oxidative stress, which promotes inflammation and production of free radicals that are very damaging to cells. Have two to five cups of green tea per day to reduce the risk of heart disease.

Cocoa: Drinking pure hot cocoa or eating 90 to 100 percent dark chocolate will increase your intake of the phytochemicals flavan-3-ols. This has been proven to lower cholesterol, triglycerides, and even blood glucose or

sugar levels. One tablespoon of cocoa powder or one square of dark chocolate can give you about 13 to 15g of flavan-3-ols. If you combine this intake with other sources like black or green tea, apple, banana, and other fruits, you will likely meet the recommended minimum 400mg of flavan-3-ols a day. Furthermore, eating dark chocolate will help reduce food cravings due to its bitterness.

Fresh orange juice: A cup of 100 percent fresh orange juice contains a lot of the plant chemical hesperidin. This promotes efficient blood flow. It also contains potassium, which balances the sodium in the body. Sodium impacts blood pressure and can increase it. Other citrus fruits like lemon, dalandan, and our locally available calamansi are also good sources of hesperidin. Be careful about adding sugar because that will add to your caloric intake and may cause blood glucose to increase, which counteracts the health benefits of the whole fruit.

This Christmas season, remember to stay healthy and prioritize your health. Have a happy, healthy holiday season.