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The Well WORKPLACE

Taking Wellness To New Heights

North America's Premier
Wellness Newsletter



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Q & A With Dr. Donnica:

Q: *My husband often tries to get out of shoveling the snow by claiming that it's not good for his heart. Is this true?*

A: Your husband may be correct, depending upon his health history. There are more fatal heart attacks among snow shovelers after heavy snowfalls. This may be due to the sudden demand shoveling places on a previously sedentary person's heart. Shoveling can be more stressful in colder weather, making it harder to work and breathe. Snow shoveling may also increase heart rate and blood pressure.

The good news: 15 minutes of snow shoveling counts as moderate physical exercise. To get in shape, your husband may need to shovel—or do other exercise—more frequently, rather than less, IF he is in relatively good health.

DONNICA L. MOORE, MD

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Heart Healthy Holidays

By Donnica L. Moore, MD

This holiday season, give yourself—and your loved ones—the gift of cardiac risk reduction. Heart disease is the number one cause of death of American men and women: someone dies of a heart attack every 20 seconds. While some of the major risk factors for heart attack aren't changeable (age, family history, and race), several are. According to the American Heart Association, half of all heart attacks are linked to known risk factors that could be eliminated. Unfortunately, most Americans haven't done it yet. Here is what you can do to reduce your heart attack risk:

- 1. Stop smoking!** Among women, smoking triples the risk of heart attack. Even women who smoke only five cigarettes per day have a doubled risk of heart attack compared to non-smokers! Cigarette smoking also lowers the age for initial heart attack. Good news: former smokers may approach the coronary risk level of a nonsmoker within 3-5 years of quitting.
- 2. Lower cholesterol, especially LDL and triglycerides.** Aim to get your "good cholesterol" (HDL) higher and reduce your triglycerides and "bad cholesterol" (LDL) as much as possible.
- 3. Control your blood pressure**
- 4. Exercise.** Regular aerobic exercise can reduce your risk of heart attack by 40 percent! Physical inactivity is associated with a doubled risk for cardiovascular events.
- 5. Control blood sugar.** Diabetes is a major risk factor for heart disease. The build-up of blood sugar can damage the walls of blood vessels. Having diabetes also greatly increases the risk of a "silent" heart attack.



- 6. Achieve—and maintain—a healthy weight.** The more overweight you are, the more demand you put on your heart. In addition, obesity increases the risks of developing or worsening high blood pressure, diabetes, and cholesterol problems. Reduce stress. Stress and repressed anger have been shown to increase blood pressure and heart rate, which can trigger a heart attack.

- 7. Consider an aspirin a day.** Ask your doctor if you are a candidate to take a baby aspirin daily, which could cut your risk of a heart attack significantly. Best candidates are men over 40, women over 50, with one or more cardiac risk factors.