



Heart Health Myths

Heart Month in February is a good time to review the current primary heart health facts and figures. Some current statistics:

1. Heart disease remains the No. 1 killer of American men and women.
2. Each year an estimated 250,000 Americans die within one hour of onset of a heart attack, and 60% to 70% of those individuals are male.
3. Older women who have heart attacks are twice as likely as men to die in a few weeks.
4. Most heart problems and strokes can be avoided through blood pressure control, a healthy diet, regular physical activity and smoking cessation.

Some key heart health myths to be aware of:

- **Myth:** Only men should worry about heart attacks. **Fact:** 44% of women in the U.S. are living with some form of heart disease, the leading cause of death for women, affecting them at any age.
- **Myth:** Heart attacks are purely hereditary. **Fact:** Only 40% of the risk for heart disease lies in hereditary factors.
- **Myth:** Chest pain is the only sign of heart attack. **Fact:** More subtle symptoms include discomfort in your back, neck, jaw or in one or both of your arms. You may feel lightheaded or short of breath and even nauseated. Take these symptoms seriously and seek medical help immediately.

Remember these heart health goals:

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet high in plant foods and fiber — and low saturated fats.
- Don't smoke or use tobacco, a primary trigger for heart damage.
- Stay physically active with 30 to 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as walking, most days.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Manage stress.
- Get regular health screening tests.

Knowing the difference between fact and fiction may save your life.

Dietary Supplements

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Some of the most common dietary supplements Americans take include vitamin D, magnesium and omega-3 fish oils.

In fact, 74% of Americans take dietary supplements, so it's a common practice. If you take supplements, here's how to ensure you are safe.

1. **Only take what you need.** Check with your health care provider or dietitian to make sure you are taking the right supplements to meet your needs. Vitamin and mineral supplements are most effective when they prevent deficiencies, but if you already get enough of a certain nutrient from food, a supplement may be overkill. More is not always better, and excess supplements can cause harm.
2. **Scan medication interactions.** Check with your pharmacist before taking any supplement, since some can interact with prescription medications (making the medicine either more or less potent). For example, vitamin K can reduce the effectiveness of blood thinners.
3. **Learn about supplement timing.** Some supplements interact with each other and should be taken together — or further apart. Plus, some are absorbed better when taken with food, while others are better on an empty stomach. Ask your pharmacist.
4. **Look for third-party testing.** While the FDA prohibits manufacturers from selling adulterated supplements — those that may contain more than one active pharmaceutical ingredient and lack necessary warnings — the manufacturers self-regulate and evaluate the safety of their products. In the past, this has led to questions about quality control. Choose products that have been third-party tested by NSF, ConsumerLab and USP (these names or logos will appear on the supplement bottle).



Remember to be realistic.

Supplements can be helpful when used as recommended by a health care professional but are not meant to replace well-balanced eating plans. Supplements are just meant to fill in the gaps. Don't expect supplements alone to be a panacea for illness.

Buying OTC Hearing Aids



By Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Hearing aids are available over-the-counter (OTC) in stores and online. The FDA regulates them as medical devices, and they've been approved for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. Unlike prescription hearing aids, no visit to a hearing health professional is required; you can fit and adjust them.

Two types are available. Self-fitting devices can be programmed to suit the user's needs. You may be instructed to complete a hearing test online or on an app, and use the results to adjust the device's controls. In contrast, non-self-fitting hearing aids are simpler, with volume control and a few predetermined settings; they are often less costly. Both types are made with a variety of features and styles.

Warnings about when to visit a health care provider are usually on the OTC device packaging. The warnings commonly include ear pain, ear drainage, excessive wax, quickly worsening hearing loss, episodes of vertigo (severe dizziness), and hearing loss or tinnitus (ringing) in only one ear.

Prescription hearing aids are still needed for more severe hearing loss, since OTC devices may not amplify sounds well enough. Consult with an audiologist or hearing health professional if you need an evaluation or have questions.

Improved hearing aid accessibility: Nearly 30 million Americans suffer from hearing loss, yet only about one-quarter of those who could benefit from hearing aids has used them. Increasing availability of OTC hearing aids could help turn this around.

Slow Down Racing Thoughts

If you've experienced racing thoughts — feeling like your mind has sped up — you know they can make it difficult to calm down and focus. Racing thoughts can result from stress, anxiety, bipolar disorder and certain medical conditions, as well as caffeine or other substances.

Try a few of these strategies and see what works best for you:

- **Breathe slowly and deeply.** Within minutes, you may feel more relaxed.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Try yoga or meditation, or focus on your experience in the moment.
- **Accept your thoughts.** Rather than resisting or judging what's happening, just notice what's happening with your mind.
- **Get busy.** Focusing on an activity, whether exercising, reading or conversing with someone, can give your mind a chance to settle down.
- **Pick a worry time.** Use this designated time to explore your concerns; at other times, simply take note of what you plan to worry about and then move on.
- **Write it down.** Putting your thoughts in a journal may help take some of the internal pressure off. Consider whether you need to take any action to improve your situation, or whether you're spending unnecessary energy on issues that are out of your control. While you're at it, jot down some things you're grateful for or happy about.
- **Talk to someone.** If you are struggling to cope with racing thoughts, talking to someone can be helpful. This could be a friend, family member or mental health professional. In some cases, medication may be recommended.



Zorba's Corner: Depression and Exercise

Depression, anxiety and distress intensified during the Covid pandemic and continue to be common conditions in the U.S. Self-care influencers tell you how to feel better, but what does science say? Antidepressants, therapy, mindfulness and meditation help. A recent study showed that exercise also is effective in relieving these psychological conditions. Researchers reviewed studies covering nearly 130,000 people and found that exercising regularly, especially physical activity that gets your heart pumping faster, also worked. During winter, finding a time and place to exercise is even more important, especially if you're prone to the winter blahs — seasonal affective disorder. — Zorba Paster, MD



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Checklist: Your Heart's Must-Haves**, is at personalbest.com/extras/24V2tools.

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