

Survey finds most Americans misinformed about heart disease

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Many are not taking steps to change their lifestyle and protect their heart.

(HealthDay)—Most Americans have a hard time separating fact from fiction when it comes to heart health, new research finds.

Although [heart disease](#) is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States, a Cleveland Clinic [survey](#) revealed that many Americans aren't worried about their [heart health](#) and are not taking any steps to guard against future heart trouble.

The survey of about 1,000 men and women aged 18 and older showed that 74 percent of Americans are not worried about dying from heart disease, and 32 percent are not taking any steps to prevent the condition. Even among the 39 percent of Americans with a [family history](#) of heart disease who are at significantly higher risk, only 26 percent are taking

action to protect their heart health.

"Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of men and women in this country, so it's disappointing to see that so many Americans are unaware of the severity of not taking action to prevent heart disease, or how exactly to do so," Dr. Steven Nissen, chairman of cardiovascular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic, said in a clinic news release.

"This is a disease that can largely be prevented and managed, but you have to be educated about how to do so and then incorporate prevention into your lifestyle," Nissen said.

The survey, which was conducted as part of the Cleveland Clinic's "Love Your Heart" consumer-education campaign, also found that most Americans do not recognize the signs of heart trouble.

Although 64 percent of Americans have heart disease or know someone who does, 70 percent of Americans are unaware of all the symptoms of the condition, the researchers found. Less than a third were able to identify unusual fatigue, sleep disturbances and jaw pain as a few of the possible signs of heart disease.

Meanwhile, Americans also have their vitamin facts wrong. Although there are no vitamins that can promote heart health, the survey found that 44 percent of Americans think vitamins can lower cholesterol and 61 percent wrongly believe that vitamins or supplements can help prevent heart disease.

Even [fish oil supplements](#) do little to prevent heart disease, the researchers said. Still, 55 percent of Americans believe taking the recommended daily dose of [fish oil](#) can ward off the condition. The researchers also cautioned that seafood could be just as high in cholesterol as red meat. The survey showed, however, that only 45

percent of Americans are aware of this.

Americans are also not up to speed on sources of sodium. When it comes to salt, about 32 percent of people wrongly believe that cheese is the biggest culprit, the survey found. Just 24 percent of Americans were aware that bread products typically have a higher salt content.

The survey also showed that almost 60 percent of Americans think there is a heart disease gene that helps determine their risk for the condition. Scientists have not yet identified any such gene.

However, having a family history of heart disease is one of the most significant risk factors for the disease, the researchers said. This can predispose you to the condition even if you take all the right steps to protect your heart health.

"There is no single way to prevent heart disease, given that every person is different," Nissen said. "Yet there are five things everyone should learn when it comes to their heart health because they can make an enormous difference: eat right; exercise regularly; know your cholesterol, blood pressure and body-mass index numbers; do not use tobacco; and know your family history."

"Taking these steps can help lead to a healthier heart and a longer, more vibrant life," he said.

More information: The American Heart Association provides more information on how to prevent [heart disease](#).

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