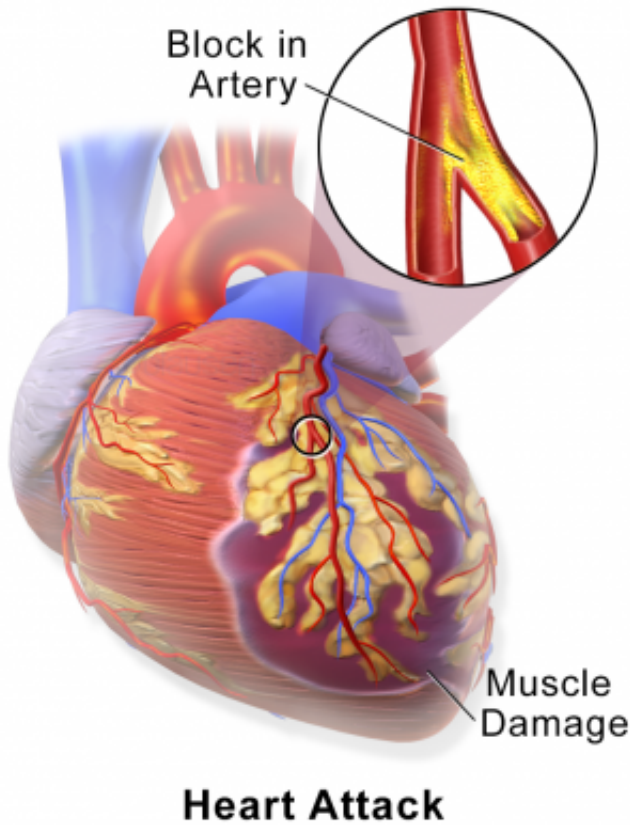


Healthy lifestyle choices may dramatically reduce risk of heart attack in men

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Myocardial Infarction or Heart Attack. Credit: Blausen Medical Communications/Wikipedia/CC-A 3.0

Following a healthy lifestyle, including maintaining a healthy weight and diet, exercise, not smoking and moderating alcohol intake, could prevent four out of five coronary events in men, according to a new study publishing today in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*.

While mortality from heart disease has declined in recent decades, with much of the reduction attributed to medical therapies, the authors said prevention through a [healthy lifestyle](#) avoids potential side effects of medication and is more cost effective for population-wide reductions in

[coronary heart disease](#).

For the study, researchers examined a population of 20,721 healthy Swedish men aged 45-79 years of age and followed them for 11 years. Lifestyle choices were assessed through a questionnaire exploring diet, alcohol consumption, smoking status, level of physical activity and abdominal adiposity (belly fat). Men in the study with the lowest risk were non-smokers, walked or cycled for at least 40 minutes per day, exercised at least one hour per week, had a waist circumference below 95 centimeters, consumed moderate amounts of alcohol, and followed a healthy diet with a regular consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, reduced-fat dairy products, whole grains and fish.

The researchers found a clear reduction in risk for heart attack for each individual lifestyle factor the participants practiced. For instance having a low-risk diet together with a moderate alcohol consumption led to an estimated 35 percent lower risk of [heart attack](#) compared to the high-risk group, those who practice none of the low-risk factors.

Men who combined the low-risk diet and [moderate alcohol consumption](#) with not smoking, being physically active and having a low amount of abdominal fat, had 86 percent lower risk. Researchers found similar results in men with hypertension and [high cholesterol levels](#).

"It is not surprising that healthy [lifestyle choices](#) would lead to a reduction in heart attacks," said Agneta Akesson, Ph.D., Associate Professor at the Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, and lead author of the study. "What is surprising is how drastically the risk dropped due to these factors."

According to the authors, less than 2 percent of the American population conforms to what is defined as ideal cardiovascular health. The burden of cardiovascular disease could be significantly

reduced through programs targeted to men and promoting low-risk lifestyle choices. Even in those who take medication, an additional reduction in risk for chronic [heart disease](#) has been observed in those with a healthy lifestyle.

"It is important to note that these lifestyle behaviors are modifiable, and changing from high-risk to low-risk behaviors can have great impact on cardiovascular health," Akesson said. "However, the best thing one can do is to adopt healthy lifestyle choices early in life."

Provided by American College of Cardiology

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