



# Love Thy Heart: A Call to Action!

by NARENDRA SINGH, MD

I have been in practice for over 30 years and sadly during this time heart disease has remained the leading cause of death in this country. We have made significant strides in both prevention and treatment, but the utilization of this knowledge remains inadequate. For many diseases such as breast cancer, colon cancer and prostate cancer we have mandated screening programs such as mammograms colonoscopy and blood tests. For the heart however there is no consistent mandate and that is why I ask you to take charge of your heart health!

## The American Heart Association lists seven simple steps to a healthy heart.

1. Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.
2. Eat a healthy diet focusing on fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains and protein.
3. Get active with moderate intensity activities for about 150 minutes/week.
4. Lose weight and at the very least keep the BMI under 30 which is the start of obesity.
5. Manage blood pressure ideally keeping around 120/80 mmHg
6. Control cholesterol targeting to keep the bad cholesterol-LDL under 100mg/dl
7. Reduce blood sugar to keep the A1c less than 5.7%.

Beyond these simple steps there are additional measures that you can take, especially if there is a family history of heart or stroke disease. A simple test often available for under \$100, called a coronary calcium score can save your life. It is a 10-minute

CT scan of the chest that does not involve any IV or contrast and is able to detect early plaque buildup. Even small plaques in your coronary arteries can rupture and lead to a heart attack. Early identification allows for tailored and aggressive treatment to shrink and stabilize these plaques. If your score is 0 then the test does not need to be repeated for three to five years and the need for cholesterol-lowering medications is often no longer required.

Another useful test is the exercise treadmill test. This involves running on a treadmill while your heart beats are monitored and your blood pressure is taken during incremental 3-minute stages. This allows for the identification of advanced blockages that would benefit from a stent or bypass operation. In addition, the test evaluates your blood pressure response to exercise and the risk for any rhythm disturbances when exercising. It also establishes a baseline safety profile to begin an exercise program.

Finally, while not for everyone, an echocardiogram is a safe noninvasive ultrasound of the heart that allows one to see how well the chambers of your heart are contracting, how well the heart valves are functioning and whether there are any congenital heart defects.

I encourage you to talk to your healthcare professional and take this opportunity to show your heart some love!

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