

The UConn Buzz



THE HEART FACTS

February is American Heart Month and serves as a reminder that [heart disease remains the number one killer of both women and men in the United States](#). The good news is you have the power to protect and improve your heart health.

To protect your heart, the first step is to learn your own personal risk factors for heart disease. Risk factors are conditions or habits that make you more likely to develop a disease. Risk factors can also increase the chances that an existing disease will get worse. Certain risk factors like getting older or having a family history of heart disease can't be changed. But you do have control over some important risk factors such as high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, excess weight, diabetes and physical inactivity. Many people have more than one risk factor. To safeguard your heart, it's best to lower or eliminate as many as you can because they tend to "gang up" and worsen each other's effects. Scientists found that middle-aged adults with more than one risk factors, such as high blood pressure, were much more likely to have a heart attack or other major heart-related event during their remaining lifetime than people with optimal levels of risk factors.

To tackle your heart risk factors, it helps to [know your numbers](#). Ask your health care provider to measure your blood cholesterol and blood pressure, and determine if your weight is in the healthy range.

[Choose good nutrition](#)

A heart-healthy diet includes a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, as well as lean meats, poultry, fish, beans and fat-free or low-fat dairy products. Try to avoid saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium (salt) and added sugar. [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension \(DASH\)](#) and [Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes \(TLC\)](#) diets both promote healthy eating.

[High blood cholesterol](#)

The higher your cholesterol level, the greater your risk for heart disease or heart attack. High blood cholesterol itself doesn't cause symptoms, so you can't know if your cholesterol is too high unless you have it tested. Routine blood tests can show your overall chole-

sterol level and separate levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol, HDL ("good") cholesterol and triglycerides. All of these blood measurements are linked to your heart health.

Total Cholesterol - is calculated using the following equation: HDL + LDL + 20 percent of your triglyceride level.

Low-density-lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol - A low LDL cholesterol level is considered good for your heart health. However, your LDL number should not be the main factor in guiding treatment to prevent heart attack and stroke. Lifestyle factors such as a diet high in saturated and trans fats can raise LDL cholesterol.

High-density-lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol - With HDL (good) cholesterol, higher levels are typically better. Low HDL cholesterol puts you at higher risk for heart disease. People with high blood triglycerides usually also have lower HDL cholesterol. Genetic factors, type 2 diabetes, smoking, being overweight and being sedentary can all result in lower HDL cholesterol.

Triglycerides - are the most common type of fat in the body. Normal triglyceride levels vary by age and sex. A high triglyceride level combined with low HDL cholesterol or high LDL cholesterol is associated with atherosclerosis, the buildup of fatty deposits in artery walls that increases the risk for heart attack and stroke.

[Lower high blood pressure](#)

High blood pressure (hypertension) is another major risk factor for heart disease, as well as for stroke. High blood pressure is often called the "silent killer" because, like high cholesterol, it usually has no symptoms. Blood pressure is always reported as 2 numbers, and any numbers above 120/80 mmHg raise your risk of heart disease and stroke. "Scientific evidence is strong that controlling high blood cholesterol and high blood pressure prevents cardiac events such as heart attacks," says Dr. Michael Lauer, a heart disease specialist at NIH.



[Be physically active every day](#)

Regular physical activity is another powerful way to reduce your risk of heart-related problems and enjoy a host of other health benefits. Studies show that people who have achieved even a moderate level of fitness are much less likely to die early than those with a low fitness level. To make physical activity a pleasure rather than a chore, choose activities you enjoy. Take a brisk walk, play ball, lift light weights, dance or garden. Even taking the stairs instead of an elevator can make a difference. Remember, something is better than nothing.

If you're inactive now, start out slow. Even a few minutes at a time may offer some health benefits. Try to work up to the 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity which research has shown can help lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol and keep your weight at a healthy level.

[Manage diabetes](#)

At least 68% of people >65 years of age with Diabetes Mellitus die of some form of HD; 16% die of stroke. Other risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, obesity, and lack of physical activity can greatly increase a person with diabetes' chance of developing cardiovascular disease.

[Quit Smoking](#)

If you are a smoker, the best thing you can do for your heart is quit. People who smoke are up to 6 times more likely to suffer a heart attack than nonsmokers. The risk of heart attack increases with the number of cigarettes smoked each day. The good news is that quitting smoking will immediately begin to reduce your risk, and the benefit in reduced risk will continue to increase over time. Just one year after you stop smoking, your risk will have dropped by more than half.

The bottom line is, it's never too late to take steps to protect your heart. Start today to keep your heart strong. Talk to your doctor about your risk and to create an action plan. Take care of your heart and it will take care of you.

HAPPENINGS AROUND TOWN

[National Go Red for Women](#) - Friday, February 1st. The American Heart Association's signature women's initiative, Go Red for Women, is a comprehensive platform designed to increase women's heart health awareness and serve as a catalyst for change to improve the lives of women globally.

[Take Your Child to the Library Day](#) - Saturday, February 2nd. Take Your Child to the Library Day (TYCLD) is an international initiative that encourages families everywhere to take their children to their local library. Launched in 2011 right here in Connecticut.

[Penguin Plunge to benefit Special Olympics Connecticut](#) - Sunday, February 10th, Farmington and other dates and location. The Penguin Plunge event gives participants the opportunity to come together with friends and other warm-hearted individuals in their community to have fun and do good. Participants jump into the chilly waters of a lake or ocean in an exciting, festive atmosphere and earn great incentive prizes by raising money online to support Special Olympics' year-round sports, health and fitness programs for people of all abilities.

[Bolton Ice Palace Public Skate](#) - Fridays, Saturday and Sunday in February. The facility features a 200' x 85' rink, four locker rooms with showers, an electric Zamboni, a Pro Shop with skate sharpening, and a full service vending room. Check out the website for more specific information.

[Cupid Made Me Do It](#) - Saturday, February 10th. This 2-mile "urban scramble" to kick off the Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival, First Baptist Church, Main St, Willimantic.



Butternut Apple Crisp

INGREDIENTS

- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar, divided
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 pounds butternut squash - peeled, seeded, and sliced thin
- 2 Granny Smith apples 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour 1/2 cup quick-cooking oats
- 3 tablespoons cold butter or margarine

DIRECTIONS

- Core and slice (do not peel) apples
- In a bowl, combine 1/2 cup brown sugar, cinnamon and salt. Add squash, sliced apples and lemon juice. Pour into a greased 9-in. square baking dish.
- Cover and bake at 350° for 30 minutes.
- In a small bowl, combine the flour, oats and remaining brown sugar. Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle over squash mixture.

February is National Children's Dental Health Month

National Children's Dental Health Month (NCDHM) began as a one-day event in Cleveland, Ohio, on February 3, 1941 and the American Dental Association held the first national observance of Children's Dental Health Day on February 8, 1949. The single day observance became a week-long event in 1955. In 1981, the program was extended to a month-long observance known today as National Children's Dental Health Month.

Your child's first dental visit should take place after that [first tooth appears](#), but no later than the first birthday. Why so early? As soon as your [baby has teeth](#), he or she can get cavities. Being proactive about your child's dental health today can help keep his or her smile healthy for life.

Developing good habits at an early age and scheduling regular dental visits helps children to get a good start on a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.

For the older kids brushing twice a day and cleaning between your teeth daily is an achievable goal they can commit to. Strengthen your smile by sharing this [2019 brushing calendar](#), with boxes to check off each time you brush and floss!

Help children of all ages learn the importance of healthy dental care habits while having fun with these coloring and activity sheets. From welcoming the tooth fairy to keeping your smile safe on the field or court, [these fun activities](#) offer dental health lessons kids can use year-round.

Need a dentist? Use the [Find-A-Dentist](#) tool form the American Dental Association to find one in your area. This tool can also help you locate a specialty dentist.



Be Well is an employee wellness program provided through the Eastern Highlands Health District with funding from The CT Department of Health. The goal of the program is to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

