When spring arrives, so do seasonal allergies. But think twice before reaching for over-the-counter medicine. Some medicines, including decongestants, work by constricting blood vessels in the nose. Taking them could be risky if you have high blood pressure. How can you treat allergy symptoms without raising blood pressure? Here are tips from the American Academy of Family Physicians:

- **Try antihistamine pills.** They relieve sneezing, itchiness, and runny nose without raising blood pressure.
- **Beat allergens with a steroid nasal spray.** Some nasal sprays reduce the body’s reaction to pollen and other allergens. You’ll need a doctor’s prescription.
- **Eye drops** can be soothing.
- **Flush the sinuses** with a saline solution from your drugstore. Also called nasal irrigation, it can improve allergy symptoms without drugs.

Not sure if an over-the-counter allergy medicine is safe for you? Ask your doctor or pharmacist.

How Can Keep My Heart Rate Under Control?
Coronary artery disease (CAD) means a blood vessel in your heart is blocked. This blockage does not let enough oxygen get to the heart. When your heart beats faster, it works harder and needs more oxygen. When it can’t get more oxygen, this can lead to chest pain, heart attack, and death.

It’s important to take steps to keep your heart rate from getting too fast. Reducing your heart rate helps take some strain off the heart. Here are four tips that can help:

❯ **Gradually increase exercise.** Talk with your doctor to find out if light aerobic exercise is right for you. Exercise strengthens the heart and actually lowers the heart rate.
❯ **Take your medicine.** Your doctor may prescribe beta-blockers, which decrease your heart rate.
❯ **Quit smoking.** Nicotine increases heart rate with each puff.
❯ **Stress less.** When stressed, your heart rate speeds up. Yoga, meditation, and deep breathing can help your body and mind relax.

For people with heart disease, it is important to make sure the following tests are up to date and to discuss these topics with your health care provider:

❯ Having your cholesterol and triglyceride levels measured at least once a year
❯ Having your blood pressure checked at every office visit
❯ Diabetes screening—your doctor may test every three years if your blood sugar reading is normal, but may test you more frequently if it is above the normal range
❯ Reviewing your medications
❯ Ask if a pneumonia vaccine is right for you

Talk with your health care provider about ways to:

❯ Eat a healthy diet and get regular exercise
❯ Manage your weight
❯ Limit your alcohol consumption
❯ Get help to quit smoking

Why Weight Management Is Key
Good weight management is especially important for people with heart disease. That’s because people with too much body fat are more likely to experience strokes and heart attacks. This is particularly true for those who have extra fat around their belly. Excess weight also increases the amount of work the heart must do. It raises blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and it lowers HDL, or “good,” cholesterol. In addition, excess weight increases the risk for diabetes. Diabetes may worsen the other risk factors and increases the chance of having a heart attack even more. If you are overweight, talk with your health care professional about how you can reach a healthy weight.

The information presented in this publication is not intended to be a substitute for medical care or advice provided by a physician. Always consult your physician for appropriate examinations, treatment and care recommendations. If you have any questions about this information, you should call your physician. Specific treatments and therapies may not be covered by your health plan. For questions about your benefits, please consult your health plan. Any reference in this material to other organizations or companies, including their Internet sites, is not an endorsement or warranty of the services, information or products provided by those organizations or companies. All models are used for illustrative purposes only. © 2012 Healthways, Inc.
Prevent Heart Failure
Start the Right Habits Today

Heart failure affects 5.7 million people in the U.S. It is a serious condition in which the heart can’t pump enough blood to meet the body’s needs. In fact, it’s the leading reason for hospital stays in people older than age 65.

Heart failure is often due to coronary artery disease. People who have had a heart attack are especially at risk. Other causes are high blood pressure and diabetes. Symptoms of heart failure include shortness of breath, tiredness, and swelling in the feet and ankles.

A healthy lifestyle goes a long way in preventing heart failure. And if you already have the disease, you can slow its progression.

Smart Habits Equal Big Benefits
A study in Circulation: Heart Failure followed 38,000 adults for 14 years. During that time, 1,088 people developed heart failure. The research showed four healthy lifestyle habits were the key to preventing the disease. These factors were not smoking, being physically active, keeping a healthy body weight, and eating vegetables. Men with just one healthy habit were about one-third less likely to develop heart failure than men with none. But men with all four healthy habits were 70 percent less likely to develop heart failure. The results were similar for women. So one good habit is a great start, but three or four is terrific.

More Good Ideas
Don’t put off making changes. The sooner you start taking healthy lifestyle steps, the better your chances of preventing this serious disease.

❯ Strive for a balanced diet.
Build your meals around vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and beans. Include lean meats, poultry, and fish, and fat-free or low-fat milk products.

❯ Be regular about exercise.
Ideally, aim for at least 30 minutes a day. But even 60 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity has heart benefits.

❯ Take control of health conditions.
Control your other risk factors for heart disease, such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Avoid saturated fat and high-sodium foods, and monitor blood glucose.

❯ Keep your doctor in the loop.
Take any medicines your doctor prescribes and see your doctor regularly.

For more information on preventing heart failure, visit http://nihseniorhealth.gov. Click on “Heart and Lungs,” then on “Heart Failure.”
Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) programs can provide great benefits for people with a wide range of heart problems.

**What is cardiac rehabilitation?**

Q: A CR program is medically supervised and helps you return to an active life and reduces the chances of further heart problems. The program includes exercise training to strengthen your heart. You’ll also learn skills for a heart-healthy lifestyle. Many programs offer mental health counseling and other services.

Before starting CR, you’ll have a medical exam. Then, CR staff will plan activities based on your goals. These might include improving fitness, reducing chest pain, managing stress, or other goals to help you manage heart disease. Patients usually attend three sessions a week for about three months. They then continue to attend for six to 12 months.

**What kinds of activities are included?**

Q: Safe, gradual exercise is a key activity. You will work one-on-one with an exercise specialist and may also exercise in a group setting. Your heart rate and blood pressure will be monitored. Many patients meet with a dietitian to create a healthy eating plan. Some people receive help to quit smoking. Others get support to manage stress and depression.

**How will CR improve my health?**

Q: CR programs help heart failure. The programs also benefit people with recent heart surgery, including bypass surgery or heart transplantation.

**Who can benefit from CR?**

Q: The American Heart Association recommends CR programs for people who have recently had a heart attack or who have chest pain, coronary artery disease, or
patients live longer. They reduce the risk for a future heart attack. They lead to healthier cholesterol and blood pressure. They can reduce chest pain. Weight loss, eating better, and quitting smoking are other pluses.

Exercise boosts your heart’s function. A study of CR in the journal Circulation found that exercise training led to better “heart rate recovery.” That’s a measure of how quickly the heart rate returns to normal after exercise. Improved heart rate recovery was linked to living longer.

Participating in a CR program can improve mood and reduce fear, anxiety, and stress. The CR team is there to help you manage your heart condition, raise your spirits, and provide support as you get back to enjoying life.

Q How can I get started?
A: Check with your benefits for coverage. Your doctor may need to refer you to a program. Many hospitals and heart clinics offer CR programs. Sometimes doctors have their patients start CR activities in the hospital while recovering from a heart attack or surgery. Others start a few weeks after returning home.

To learn more about what a CR program includes, visit the American College of Cardiology website, www.cardiosmart.org. Type “cardiac rehabilitation” in the search box to see a list of articles on this topic.

Are You Potassium-Smart?

A study in Archives of Internal Medicine found that diets low in potassium and high in sodium increase the risk for death from heart disease. Test your potassium knowledge with this quiz.

1. Potassium is needed to:
   A. Balance fluids inside and outside cells
   B. Keep blood pressure normal
   C. Help muscles and nerves work
   D. Counter the harmful effects of sodium
   E. All of the above

2. According to the Institute of Medicine, adults need how much potassium (in milligrams) daily?
   A. 450
   B. 1,000
   C. 4,700

3. Which of these foods are NOT good sources of potassium?
   A. Oranges, bananas, peas, beans
   B. White bread, white rice, coffee
   C. Tuna, and fat-free and low-fat milk and yogurt

4. It’s safe to meet potassium needs with a supplement.
   True  False

Answers
1. E. Potassium has important roles throughout the body.
2. C. Most adults get only about half this amount.
3. B. Aim for several portions of potassium-rich foods daily, such as vegetables, fruits, or lean meats.
4. False. Supplements may not be safe for older people and those with kidney problems. Before taking a potassium supplement or salt substitute (potassium chloride), talk with your doctor.
Heart attack and stroke are major health risks for both sexes. But the American Heart Association’s guidelines emphasize that 55,000 more women than men die of stroke each year. Women should understand their personal risk factors and discuss them with their doctor. Some lesser-known risk factors discussed in the guidelines include:

**Pregnancy Problems**
Women who have had certain complications during pregnancy have a higher risk for cardiovascular disease later in life. These complications include having gestational diabetes, preeclampsia (high blood pressure and protein in the urine), and a premature or low-weight baby. For example, women with a history of preeclampsia have double the risk of coronary artery disease or stroke in the five to 15 years after pregnancy compared with women who did not develop preeclampsia when they were pregnant.

**Atrial Fibrillation**
Atrial fibrillation is an abnormal heart rhythm that commonly occurs in both men and women. But the guidelines point out that women who have atrial fibrillation are four to five times more likely to have a stroke than those who don’t.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
55,000 more women than men die of stroke each year.

**Antihistamine.** Antihistamines are medicines that prevent or ease allergy symptoms. Allergens—like pollen—cause your body to release histamines. These cause symptoms like itching, sneezing, and runny nose. Antihistamines stop them from causing these symptoms.

**Coronary artery disease (CAD).** This condition occurs when the arteries become narrowed from the buildup of fatty plaques. Narrow arteries reduce the amount of blood with oxygen that flows to the heart, which can lead to a heart attack.

**Pacemaker.** This is a device that is placed under the skin (usually of your chest) with wires going to your heart to control abnormal heart rhythms. They are used when hearts beat too quickly or too slowly. Pacemakers are also used for hearts with irregular rhythms. Electrical pulses from the pacemaker help the heart beat at a normal rate.

**Potassium.** Potassium is a mineral found in all meats and many fish, vegetables, fruits, and dairy products. Potassium is necessary for cells, tissues, and organs to work properly.

**TERMS TO KNOW**

- **Antihistamine.**
- **Coronary artery disease (CAD).**
- **Pacemaker.**
- **Potassium.**

**Women have the power to prevent heart disease.**
Learn heart disease prevention tips by visiting the AHA’s patient website, [www.hearthub.org](http://www.hearthub.org).
Got bran flakes? Starting your day off with a healthy breakfast has great benefits for your heart. Nutty-flavored whole grains are chock-full of natural fiber, vitamins, and minerals. And according to a study in *Clinical Nutrition*, men who ate whole-grain cereal for breakfast were less likely to have high blood pressure. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease.

If you’re crunched for time in the morning, a whole-grain breakfast can be had in minutes. Try these lickety-split ideas:

❯ Spread a whole wheat tortilla with peanut butter, add a banana, and roll it up.
❯ Top a multigrain toaster waffle with low-fat or nonfat yogurt and sliced fruit.
❯ Make instant oatmeal with low-fat or nonfat milk. Add dried cranberries and chopped walnuts.
❯ Tuck slices of lean ham and tomato into a toasted whole wheat English muffin.
❯ Stuff a whole wheat pita with a sliced hard-cooked egg, low-fat Swiss cheese, and a spoonful of salsa.

Planning ahead ensures you don’t skip breakfast, even when mornings are rushed. Set out your bowl, cereal, and fruit the night before. Or make up several single-serving bags of low-fat granola, nuts, and dried fruit you can grab as you run out the door.

**Swiss Muesli**

*Serves 6*

**Ingredients**

- 1½ cups rolled oats
- 1½ cups water
- 2 cups shredded, unpeeled apples
- 1½ cups (approximately 9 oz.) pitted prunes, whole or halved
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice
- ½ tsp. cinnamon
- 3 bananas, sliced
- 3 oranges, segmented
- 1 cup chopped almonds

**Directions**

Combine oats, water, shredded apples, prunes, honey, lemon juice and cinnamon. Cover and refrigerate overnight. In the morning, spoon some of the muesli into a cereal bowl. Top with your choice of fresh fruits and nuts. Serve with a dollop of plain yogurt or milk, if desired. Muesli can be stored in a covered container in the refrigerator for several days.

**Serving Size** 1/6 recipe

Each serving provides

- Calories 410, total fat 10 g, saturated fat 1 g, cholesterol 0 mg, sodium 0 mg,
- carbohydrates 78 g, fiber 11 g, protein 9 g

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**Want more healthy breakfast ideas?**

Visit www.heart.org and search for “Healthy on the Run.” Then click on the article with the same name.
Got a Second?  
MAKE IT HEALTHY

When it comes to your health, many simple but important things take just seconds or minutes. Here are a few quick steps toward better health.

**Less than 60 Seconds**
- **Wash your hands.** Doing so can often reduce your risk of spreading germs or getting sick.
- **Fasten your seat belt.** Buckling up can lower your risk of dying in a motor vehicle accident by more than 50 percent.

**Five Minutes or Less**
- **Eat more fruits and vegetables.** It takes just minutes to eat an apple or carrot stick with dip. Healthier options prevent diseases, like stroke and cancer.
- **Take a stress break.** Using five minutes to stretch or go for a short walk during the workday can reduce stress, muscle soreness, and eyestrain.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and search for "five minutes or less for health."