

# Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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## Thoughts from Dr. Amy 5 Heart-healthy New Year's Resolutions and How to Keep Them

Chances are that you plan to ring in the New Year with visions of a thinner, fitter and healthier year ahead. Unfortunately, surveys show that 35% of Americans break their resolutions by the end of January. The key to success is to swap grandiose ambitions for smart, specific and achievable goals that do your heart good. That means making promises you CAN keep.



Here's a look at heart-healthy New Year's resolutions, plus science-based tips on how to make them work. With the right success strategies and a little determination, you really can be your best, healthiest self in 2017--and beyond!

- 1. Slim down.** If getting to your ideal weight seems daunting, start with a more modest goal. Shedding as few as 7 to 10 pounds reduces risk for type 2 diabetes (a major risk factor for heart disease) by up to 70%, even if you are already pre-diabetic. A strategy that makes it easier to drop those stubborn extra pounds is tracking what you eat. In a [study](#) by Kaiser Permanente's Center for Health Research, people who kept a daily food diary had double the weight loss of those who didn't keep any records.
- 2. Fit in fitness.** Instead of vowing to exercise every day for the rest of your life, commit to doing it for one month, then take that success forward for another 30 days. Also figure out what would make working out more appealing--would dancing to music make it a "fun break?" Would an exercise buddy help--or even a group session? And clip on a pedometer: Doing so motivates people to take 2,000 extra steps (one extra mile) per day, a [study](#) at Stanford University found. The Bale Doneen Method recommends at least 22 minutes of exercise daily. However, it's important to check with your medical provider before starting a new fitness regimen to make sure it's appropriate for you.
- 3. Tame tension.** Chronic stress takes a toll on every organ in the body, including the heart, by repeatedly activating the "fight-or-flight" response. Laughter is relaxing and improves blood vessel health,

research shows. Try laughter yoga, which combines self-triggered mirth with yogic breathing to draw oxygen deep into the body. Also embrace the cuddle cure: Researchers from University of North Carolina report that holding hands—or even a 10-second hug from your significant other—significantly reduces tension, heart rate, and blood pressure. And it feels good!

- 4. Shake the sugar habit.** Drinking just one or two sugar-sweetened beverages daily raises risk for a heart attack or dying from heart disease by 35%, [a Harvard study found](#). Since sweet beverages are the top source of sugar in the American diet, rethinking your drink is a smart first step towards going entirely sugar-free. As [our October newsletter reported](#), fresh fruit is a healthy way to satisfy your sweet tooth: Studies show that people who eat the most fruit and veggies have the lowest risk for stroke. Try plain or sparkling water flavored with a spritz of lemon or lime as a calorie-free thirst quencher.
- 5. Optimize your oral health.** If you haven't seen your dentist lately, here's some powerful motivation to make an appointment: Keeping your gums healthy could help you avoid a heart attack! Conversely, having periodontal (gum) disease due to certain high-risk oral bacteria can actually *cause* cardiovascular disease, according to [a landmark new Bale Doneen study published in British Medical Journal](#). To find out if you have this dangerous dental condition and how to safeguard your arteries--and your smile--if you do, check out our report on the next page of this newsletter.

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## Landmark Bale Doneen Study Discovers New, Treatable Cause of Heart Disease



A common dental disorder found in millions of Americans can lead to heart attacks and strokes, according to [a new peer-reviewed Bale Doneen study published in \*British Medical Journal \(BMJ\)\*](#). The study is the first to identify periodontal disease (PD) due to certain high-risk oral bacteria as a contributing cause of cardiovascular disease (CVD), the leading killer of men and women globally.

The research, which draws on Level A scientific evidence, has potentially lifesaving implications by suggesting a new strategy to help prevent heart attacks and strokes. Here is a closer look at the study and key takeaways you can use to optimize your oral and cardiovascular health.

### Why is this study groundbreaking?

Earlier research, including a scientific statement by the American Heart Association, has shown a strong, independent association between PD, which affects the majority of U.S. adults over age 30, and CV events. In fact, [a 2016 meta-analysis](#) that pooled studies of more than 7,000 people found those with periodontitis were more than twice as likely to suffer heart attacks, compared to people with healthy gums!

However, there is a key difference between a condition being *associated* with another disease versus being *causal*. Optimal treatment of an associated condition may have no impact on risk of developing the end disease, while such management of a causal condition for CVD would not only have a beneficial effect, but could be potentially lifesaving, by helping to prevent heart attacks and strokes.

### What are the warning signs of PD and how is it treated?

Also known as gum disease, PD often has no symptoms in the early stages. As a result, millions of people don't realize they have a serious oral infection that can lead to tooth loss if untreated--and has now been shown to cause CVD. Warning signs include red, swollen or tender gums, bleeding while brushing or flossing, receding gums, loose or sensitive teeth, and persistent bad breath.

To find out if you have PD, ask your dentist or hygienist to examine your gums, using a mirror and periodontal probe to check for signs of oral infection. If you have CVD, also discuss being checked for the high-risk bacteria discussed in the *BMJ* study, using [the OralDNA saliva test](#), even if you don't have any obvious signs of PD.

While there is no treatment proven to be 100% effective in eradicating these high-risk bacteria, treatments for PD include deep cleaning, a daily program of oral care to follow at home, prescription mouthwashes, dental trays with antibacterial gel, and oral antibiotics. Regardless of which

treatment is prescribed, the Bale Doneen Method recommends repeating the OralDNA test afterwards to see if it worked.

### What are the best ways to avoid PD - and lower heart attack risk?

If you smoke, here's yet another reason to kick the habit: It's a leading risk factor for developing gum disease. We also advise these measures to promote oral wellness:

- **Brush and floss twice a day.** Although you may have seen headlines claiming there's not much science to support flossing, in [a nine-year study of 5,611 older adults](#), people who never flossed had a 30% higher death rate than those who flossed daily!
- **Go to bed with a clean mouth.** The study found that never brushing at night raised mortality risk by 25%, versus nightly brushing. Since your mouth produces less saliva to wash your teeth and gums when you're sleeping, it's particularly crucial to floss and brush thoroughly before bed. We recommend using a sonic toothbrush for best results.
- **Get a dental cleaning every 3 months, or as advised by your dental provider.** The study also found that people who hadn't gone to a dentist in the previous year had a 50% higher mortality rate than those who went 2 or more times annually, prompting the researchers to conclude that good oral health promotes longevity by helping people avoid deadly systemic diseases sparked by infections and chronic inflammation, such as CVD.
- **Share the BMJ study with your dentist.** Because this science is so new, your dental provider may not be aware of it yet. Use it to encourage him or her to join your heart attack and stroke prevention team!

## Recipe Sugar-free Cinnamon Skillet Apples

Along with its delightfully festive aroma, cinnamon has impressive health benefits, including [improving blood sugar and lipid levels](#) in people with type 2 diabetes. Prized as a food and medicine for thousands of years, this tasty spice also fights inflammation and oral bacteria, which may help prevent periodontal (gum) disease, according to research published in [Journal of Contemporary Dental Practice](#).

Here's a delicious, easy and vegan-friendly way to enjoy cinnamon in your holiday meal. For a flavor variation, substitute golden raisins for dried cranberries.



- 1/2 cup water
- 6 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

Toast nuts over medium-low heat in a skillet for 6-8 minutes, stirring frequently to toast evenly. Remove from skillet and set aside. Add water, apples, cranberries, and cinnamon to skillet. Cover and cook over medium-low heat until apples are softened (6-10 minutes). Divide mixture into four serving bowls and top with toasted nuts. Makes 4 servings.

Adapted from [HealthyLiv.com](#) and [TasteOfHome.com](#).