

Heart TALK

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

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*Thoughts
from
Dr. Amy*

**Dr. Amy Doneen,
DNP, ARNP**

Here's hoping you had a wonderful holiday season and have kicked off 2016 with enthusiasm and a continued commitment to your overall health.

Did you know that heart attack and stroke risk rises in the winter, regardless of the outside temperature? A [recent study](#) found that deaths from cardiovascular causes are up to 36 percent higher in winter, compared to the summer. The researchers analyzed rates in seven U.S. locations with different climates over a four-year period.

However, the good news is that there's a lot you can do to protect your heart health this winter. Here are five heart-smart tips:

1. Go out and play! From skiing to ice skating and snowshoeing, there are lots of fun winter sports to help you get the minimum of 22 minutes of cardiovascular exercise we recommend daily. For safer jogging and running in icy conditions, add traction to your running shoes with slip-ons, such as [YakTrax](#). Dress in layers and wear a hat to stay warm.

2. Get a flu shot. A 2013 [analysis of studies](#) of 6,735 patients found getting the influenza vaccine cut risk for heart attack, stroke, and other major cardiac events—including death—by about one-third over the following year. The [researchers suggest](#) that inflammation from flu may lead to the rupture of plaque in the arteries, which could spark a heart attack or stroke.

3. Have your vitamin D levels checked. Deficiency in the sunshine vitamin is very common in the winter, increasing cardiovascular risk. In fact, a [Harvard study](#) found that low vitamin D levels double risk for heart attack.

4. Avoid alcohol before or immediately after shoveling snow. Alcohol may increase people's sensation of warmth and cause them to underestimate the extra strain their body is under in the cold, the [American Heart Association reports](#). Also take frequent rest breaks and avoid overexertion.

5. Feast on anti-inflammatory foods. Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, sardines, and other oily fish, as well as nuts, support healthy blood pressure and boost brain function. To reduce heart-harming inflammation, [new dietary guidelines](#) for Americans advise limiting sugar to less than 10 percent of your daily calories.

Enjoy the winter months—it's a great time to improve your health. Stay warm!

Dr. Amy

Chicken Soup is Good for You!

Chicken soup has been long touted as a natural remedy for colds. In fact, it was first prescribed by 12th Century physician Maimonides, who recommended broth of hens and other fowl to treat respiratory ailments in his book *On the Cause of Symptoms*.

[Research](#) suggests that that chicken soup really does work, reducing congestion and nasal inflammation more effectively than other hot liquids. While scientists don't know which ingredient accounts for these benefits, we are pleased to share our version of [a recipe](#) used in [a study](#) conducted by University of Nebraska Medical Center. The findings were published in the journal [CHEST](#).

Find our great chicken soup recipe on page 2 of this newsletter!

Stay in Touch!

When it comes to preventing heart attacks and strokes, knowledge is power! Keep up with the latest news on heart health and wellness by following the HASPC on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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Three New Tests to Check for Hidden Heart Disease Risk

We're excited to offer three new blood tests to further improve your cardiovascular risk assessment. Here's a look at these tests, each of which has been scientifically validated by peer-reviewed studies.

1. ADMA/SDMA biomarker test.

What it checks: This blood test measures levels of asymmetric dimethylarginine (ADMA) and symmetric dimethylarginine (SDMA).

Why we recommend this test: As I [recently reported](#) in Cleveland HeartLab's Health Horizon's blog, elevated levels of ADMA/SDMA can indicate damage to the endothelium (the inner lining of blood vessels) and are also an independent predictor of heart attack risk. When the endothelium is damaged, LDL (bad) cholesterol particles can invade the artery wall and clump into plaque, which could lead to a heart attack or stroke. Endothelial damage also raises risk for kidney failure.

The ADMA/SDMA test may reveal the underlying cause of high blood pressure and vascular inflammation. As [a groundbreaking 2002 study demonstrated](#), high levels of ADMA/SDMA can be an early warning sign of insulin resistance, the root cause of type 2 diabetes and about 70 percent of heart attacks.

2. TMAO biomarker test.

What it checks: This test measures levels of trimethylamine-N-oxide (TMAO), a gut bacteria byproduct that contributes to heart disease risk. The liver produces TMAO after intestinal microbes digest certain nutrients in animal-derived food, such as L-carnitine (found in red meat) and lecithin (found in egg yolks, meats and full-fat dairy products).

Why we recommend this test: Elevated levels of TMAO predict future danger for heart attack, stroke, and early death in

people not otherwise identified by traditional risk factors, according to Cleveland Clinic research published in [New England Journal of Medicine](#) and [Nature Medicine](#). In the studies, those with the highest TMAO levels had 2.5 times higher risk for a cardiovascular event (such as a heart attack or stroke) over the next three years, compared to those with the lowest levels.

The researchers found that TMAO directly contributes to cholesterol buildup in the arteries, a discovery hailed by the American Heart Association as one of the [top 10 advances in heart disease and stroke science in 2013](#). These findings are exciting because they offer new insight into why eating meat and full-fat dairy foods triggers inflammation and arterial disease in some people. An important benefit of the new TMAO test is that it can help medical providers improve their dietary recommendations for patients.

3. Haptoglobin genotype test.

What it checks: This test checks for variants of the haptoglobin (Hgb) gene. Located on chromosome 16, this gene regulates haptoglobin, a protein produced by the liver that binds to hemoglobin, which is produced when blood cells die. If hemoglobin isn't bound quickly, it releases iron, which can damage blood-vessel health in various ways. For example, iron oxidizes LDL cholesterol, making it more harmful to arteries. In diabetics, hemoglobin will also attach to HDL, negating its heart-protective powers.

Why we recommend this test: Hgb genotyping [predicts heart disease risk in diabetic patients](#). There are two alleles of the haptoglobin gene: Hgb 1 and Hgb 2. Since you inherit one allele from each parent, there are three possible genotypes: Hgb 1/1 (low risk), Hgb 2/1 (intermediate risk) and Hgb 2/2 (high risk). If you are a diabetic with the 2/2 genotype, your lifetime risk of heart disease is triple that of a diabetic with the 2/1 genotype and quintuple that of a diabetic with the 1/1 genotype.

Grandma's Chicken Soup with Vegetables



Ingredients

- 1 5- to 6-pound stewing hen or baking chicken
- 1 pound chicken wings
- 3 large onions, peeled and quartered
- 1 large sweet potato, peeled and halved
- 3 parsnips, unpeeled and halved
- 2 turnips, unpeeled and halved
- 11 to 12 large carrots, unpeeled and halved
- 5 to 6 celery stems, cut into thirds
- 1 bunch of parsley (sprigs only)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Matzo balls prepared according to the recipe on the back of the box of matzo meal (Manischewitz matzo meal was used in study)

Put chicken in a large pot, cover with cold water and bring to a boil. Add chicken wings, onions, sweet potato, parsnips, turnips and carrots. Reduce heat and simmer for 90 minutes, skimming fat occasionally. Add parsley and celery, and cook for 45 minutes.

Remove chicken and save for another use (such as chicken parmesan). Mince the cooked vegetables in a food processor or pass through a strainer. Add the chopped or strained vegetables to the broth, season with salt and pepper to taste and reheat. Serve with cooked matzo balls and garnishes of your choice, such as sprigs of dill, thyme or other fresh herbs. Note: this soup freezes well.
