

The 5 Supplements Your Heart Needs

Supplement your diet or medicine regimen with these doctor-approved extras for your heart

By: Amanda Junker

Don't want to end up on a stretcher? Then supplement your ticker with these pills and nutrients to prevent any trouble in the first place. "I think of supplements as things that enable the body. A lot prescription medicines block a process, so I prefer to enable instead of block, enhance instead of stop," says Keith Berkowitz, M.D., from the Center for Balanced Health in New York City. From the vitamin that helps boost good cholesterol to the fat that helps lube the arteries, we have five recommendations that will arm your body against cardiac arrest.

Aspirin

Aspirin is an anti-inflammatory medicine that thins your blood, making it more difficult for your body to develop clots that can cause heart attacks. A Canadian study shows aspirin is especially effective in men. The reason why isn't confirmed, but researchers speculate it's because "blood clots tend to form in bigger blood vessels in men, and aspirin could have bigger efficacy in these larger cells more readily," says Don Sin, M.D., of University of British Columbia, one of the study's researchers.

Recommended if: You've had a previous cardiac event, have a family history of heart attack, or are in the midst of a heart attack (uh, in which case, call 911, too)

Dosage: One 80 mg baby aspirin tablet daily

Omega-3

This fatty acid is found in fish, and it can be helpful in balancing blood lipids such as cholesterol and triglycerides. "Fish oil is helpful for people who have high triglycerides or who are at risk of heart disease," says Charles Campbell, M.D., clinical cardiologist and director of inpatient services at the University of Kentucky. Studies show Omega-3 can help prevent heart attack because it slows the build-up of plaque in the arteries. You can get pure fish oil in capsule form, but that can be expensive, and eating more fish will do more to improve your total health. "The best way to treat triglycerides is to treat metabolic syndrome with diet and exercise—prevention starts there," he says.

Recommended if: You have high triglycerides or a family history heart disease

Dosage: A serving of fish twice a week or 1,000 mg daily

Food sources: Oily fish like salmon, tuna, and mackerel

Vitamin D

D can determine your risk of heart attack, according to a recent Framington Heart Study. "Vitamin D deficiency is associated with increased cardiovascular risk, above and beyond established cardiovascular risk factors," said Thomas J. Wang, M.D., assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Mass. The higher risk was particularly evident among individuals with high blood pressure.

Recommended if: You don't get much sun—85 percent of people in North America are deficient

Dosage: 400 to 800 IU of vitamin D3

Food sources: Dairy products and oily fish like salmon and tuna

Coenzyme Q 10

"CoQ10 has shown to increase heart contractility [the performance of cardiac muscles]," says Dr. Campbell. A bonus: It may improve muscle function throughout your whole body. Preliminary research suggests that CoQ10 causes small decreases in blood pressure (systolic and possibly diastolic), according to the Mayo Clinic. Low blood levels of CoQ10 have been found in people with hypertension, although it is not clear if CoQ10 "deficiency" is a cause of high blood pressure.