

Cleveland Clinic Miller Family Heart & Vascular Institute

Resources for Patients

Myth Versus Reality

Believing myths can be dangerous to your health. Learning the realities of managing heart disease can keep you out of harm's way

Information about heart disease is sometimes twisted into myths that may confuse or even mislead people. Believing those myths, however, can jeopardize your heart health.

That's why in recognition of February as American Heart Month, [Curtis Rimmerman, MD](#), Cleveland Clinic staff cardiologist, sets the record straight and uncovers the truth about heart disease myths. Dr. Rimmerman is the author of a new book, *The Cleveland Clinic Guide to Heart Attacks*, which in its first chapter debunks the top myths that involve medications, weight and exercise.

Myth: When my blood pressure and cholesterol readings are good, I don't have to take my medications.

Reality: Deciding to stop taking your medications without a physician's advice is potentially dangerous. If you stop taking your blood pressure medication, for example, you could have a marked elevation in both your blood pressure and your heart rate and have no symptoms. Higher blood pressure and heart rates expose you to a greater likelihood of triggering a heart attack or a stroke, especially if you already have been diagnosed with a heart condition.

Always talk to your physician about your medications and address your need for them. Patients who reform their lifestyle habits with a healthy diet, regular exercise, weight loss and no smoking, stand a better chance of having their medications reduced or in some cases discontinued. For patients who have had a heart attack, it is beneficial – and potentially lifesaving – to continue their medications regardless of how low their blood pressure and cholesterol numbers are.

Myth: My weight is ideal so I don't have to worry about what I eat.

Reality: Even people of a normal weight can have significant blockages in their arteries. They also can have high blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as diabetes. While individuals of an ideal weight are less likely to have these health issues, your genetic makeup can predispose you to abnormalities, such as high cholesterol or other heart-related issues. In 1995, champion Russian skater Sergei Grinkov collapsed and died. He was just 28 years old. This person was in top physical condition, but an autopsy confirmed he had horrific cholesterol levels and horrific coronary disease.

Determining your ideal body weight can be a bit tricky because it's not just based on how tall you are but also your body shape or bone structure. In addition, it's important to know your body mass index (BMI), which can correlate with your body fat content. Your physician or a nutritionist can find out your normal body weight as well as your BMI. Many studies have shown a Mediterranean-style diet can help you maintain your normal weight and your cardiovascular health. This diet includes whole grains, fish, olive oil, fresh fruits and vegetables, and very limited amounts of meats, processed or sugary foods.

Myth: It takes too many hours to keep my heart healthy.

Reality: I always tell my patients, some movement is better than no movement. Optimally, though, it's recommended you get at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise four to five times a week. What that means is continual activity at a point where you are sweating and starting to speak in fragmented sentences. But the exercise should be comfortable, not punitive. You need to make exercise a daily habit like brushing your teeth or sleeping. Your exercise regimen

should be convenient and efficient. That means if you are not the type of person to go to a health club in the dead of winter, then exercise at home. There are 1,440 minutes in every day. You can find 30 minutes in your day to exercise. Remember, if you experience any pain while exercising, stop and call your physician. Also, get a full physical before you start an exercise plan if you haven't exercised in years.

To make an appointment:

You do not need a referral to make an appointment in the Preventive Cardiology Programs. For more information or to make an appointment, please call 216.444.9353 or 800.223.2273, ext. 49353.

For more information:

- Learn more about [heart disease prevention](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Chat online with a nurse](#)
- Call the Miller Family Heart & Vascular Institute Resource & Information Nurse at 216.445.9288 or toll-free at 866.289.6911.

We would be happy to help you.

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