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MEET Steve

Steve is the Senior Director of Operational Improvement in the MML Americas Group. He is a caring father and a loving husband.

In this article, learn how Steve prevented his own heart attack by identifying warning signs and advocating for proper care.

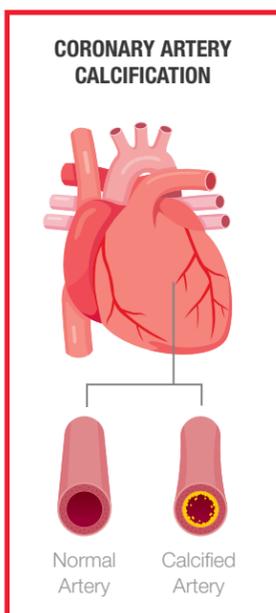
Steve knew about his family history of heart disease but thought “that’s not going to be me.” He ate healthy, exercised regularly, and raced Ironman triathlons. Steve told us, “People would not consider me a candidate for a heart attack.”

In April 2023, Steve started feeling chest pain when mowing the lawn. The pain reduced once he rested, so he did not think it was a heart attack. But the pain would return during light physical activity. Then the pain began to radiate up his neck. Something felt wrong, so Steve booked a doctor’s appointment.

Over the next two months, Steve worked with doctors to find the problem by advocating for comprehensive tests. In the time he waited between tests, Steve spoke with his father. His father said that he ignored the same pains before his heart attack. So, Steve knew he had made the right choice by pursuing care.

Steve’s tests revealed that he had coronary artery disease. An angiogram, which scans blood flow near the heart, found three arteries with significant plaque blockages.

These blockages were straining his heart and put him at extremely high risk for a heart attack.



In June and July 2023, Steve’s doctor managed to open two blocked arteries with mesh tubes called stents, restoring proper blood flow to the heart.

Steve’s doctors monitor the remaining blockage every few months. Steve was happy to tell us that his follow-up test showed that his heart was working well. He continues to care for himself with medication and a healthy lifestyle.

Steve’s story shows how vital it is to be proactive when it comes to your health. He wishes he had sought medical care sooner to help prevent blockages. Steve explained, “it’s a pain to book a doctor’s appointment, but at the end of the day, it’s worth it.”

Regardless of your risk, book regular check-ups with the doctor and always pay attention to warning signs.

If you ever have chest pain that lasts longer than 3 minutes that does not go away when you rest or take medication, call your local emergency services right away and go to the hospital with them.

DID YOU KNOW?

Quitting tobacco smoking will benefit your cardiovascular health immediately and long-term!

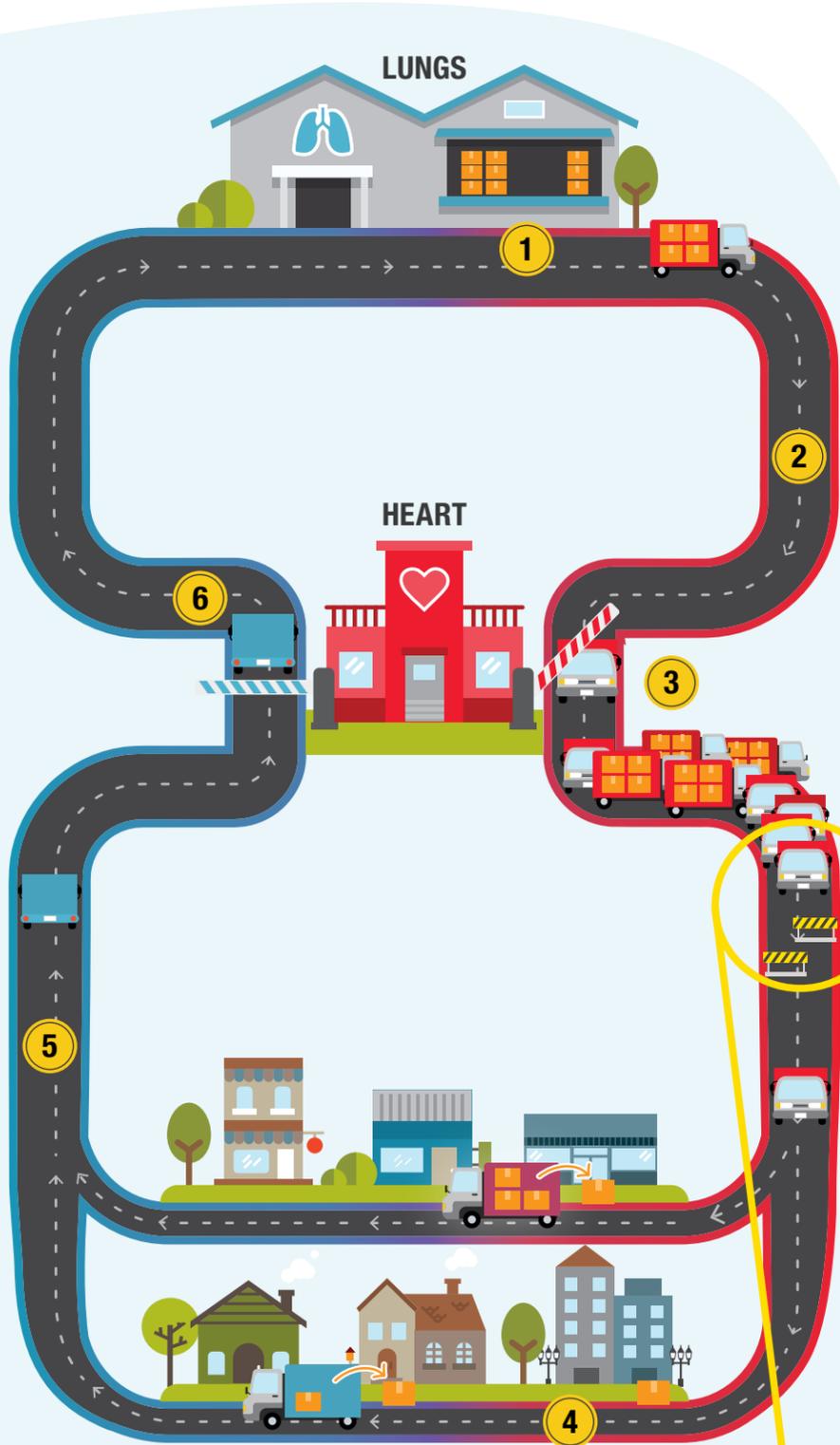
Within 24 hours of quitting, your chance of having a heart attack starts to decrease. After a year, your risk of developing heart disease is cut in half. Your risk of having a stroke will be the same as that of a non-smoker after 5 years. Within 15 years, your risk of developing heart disease will be the same as a non-smoker. If you want to quit smoking, enroll in a smoking cessation program for support and guidance. Quitting is not easy, but the benefits are unmatched.



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Life is a **HIGHWAY**



Take a minute to look at the underside of your wrist. You might see blood vessels underneath your skin. If you place your hand on the left side of your chest, you may be able to feel the beat of your heart. Your heart and blood vessels make up your cardiovascular system, but how does it all work together?

You can think of your cardiovascular system like a shipping business.

LUNGS – Your lungs are the **warehouse**.

BLOOD CELLS – Your blood cells are the **trucks** that the warehouse sends on shipments.

HEART – Your heart is a **gatehouse** that controls the flow of traffic.

BLOOD VESSELS – Your blood vessels are the **roads** that blood cells use to travel. These vessels include your arteries, capillaries, and veins.

Every time your heart beats, it pushes oxygen-rich blood cells to your whole body. Let's take a closer look at how this happens!

- 1 First, the trucks leave the lungs warehouse loaded with oxygen.
- 2 The trucks travel down large blood vessels called arteries. Arteries are like highways – they have a lot of blood move through them quickly.
- 3 The trucks pass through the heart gatehouse and then travel out to the body.
- 4 To reach their destination, the trucks leave the highways and takes smaller roads called capillaries. In the capillaries, oxygen is delivered to the cells, just like drivers deliver products to shops.
- 5 Once the delivery is made, the empty trucks travel back to the heart in blood vessels called veins.
- 6 The trucks pass through the heart gatehouse and get sent to the lungs to load up with oxygen again. Then the whole process repeats.

This shipping business loop runs all day, every day, for your entire life.

Just like customers and shops need their products, your cells require a consistent supply of oxygen to function. But these deliveries can go wrong. In some cases, people develop plaque in their arteries. As arteries fill with plaque and narrow, blood flow will slow. In extreme cases, arteries can get completely blocked with plaque.

You can think of this like traffic growing on a highway because of potholes and lane closures. Big highways that used to run smoothly become slow and could close completely.

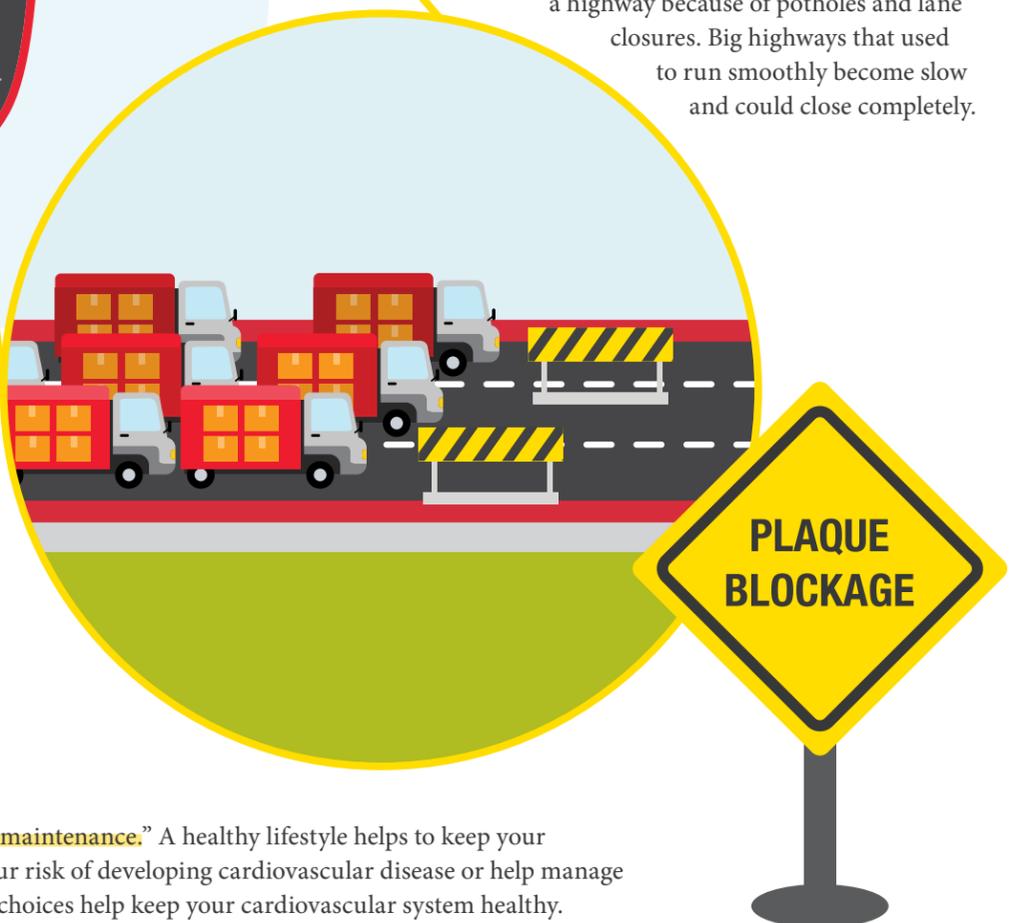
YOU MIGHT BE ASKING YOURSELF:

How can I avoid causing blockages on my highways?

Having cardiovascular issues like high cholesterol or high blood pressure will cause plaque buildup and damage to your arteries over time. There are many factors that increase your risk for these cardiovascular issues. Some factors that raise your risk are outside of your control, like age and family history. Other factors are within your control. For example, eating fried foods, fatty meats, or baked goods frequently, smoking, and being inactive will increase your risk for nearly all cardiovascular issues.

With any of these risk factors and no treatment, an artery can eventually get fully blocked. This will stop oxygen from reaching cells that need it. Depending on which artery gets blocked, you could develop a cardiovascular disease, suffer a heart attack, or have a stroke.

Fortunately, as the owner of your body, **you have some control over your "road maintenance."** A healthy lifestyle helps to keep your arteries clear and can repair damages. Taking care of your body will reduce your risk of developing cardiovascular disease or help manage conditions you already have. Read the next article to learn about what lifestyle choices help keep your cardiovascular system healthy.

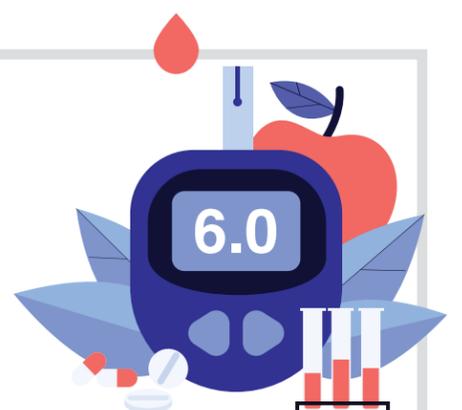


DID YOU KNOW?

Having diabetes increases the risk of developing heart disease and stroke.

High blood sugar from diabetes can damage the blood vessels and nerves controlling your heart, which can lead to heart disease over time. A stroke may also occur if the blood vessels in the brain are damaged due to diabetes. The longer you have uncontrolled diabetes, the bigger these risks become.

Fortunately, effectively managing blood sugar through lifestyle and medication can help lower the risk of heart disease and stroke for those with diabetes. Talk to your doctor about what care plan is right for you.



THRIVING HEART:

Tips for a Healthier Cardiovascular Journey

You have more control over your heart health than you might realize. By making healthy lifestyle choices, you can protect yourself from cardiovascular issues or help better manage ones you already have. Even the smallest changes can make a big difference. Here are some ideas to help you:



1 CHOOSE NUTRITIOUS AND DELICIOUS

Eating more nutrient-rich foods like vegetables, whole grains, and fruits are a great way to care for your heart. Remember, nutritious meals do not have to be bland. Try the recipe on the next page that will keep your heart and taste buds wanting more!



2 GO FOR HEALTHY FATS

A diet high in salt and unhealthy fats (saturated and trans) can lead to high cholesterol, plaque build-up, high blood pressure, or obesity, which are risk factors for heart disease. Stick to unsaturated fats and low salt options, where possible.



3 GET YOUR MUSCLES MOVING

The heart is a muscle. Like other muscles, it needs a workout! Luckily, any physical activities that raise your heart rate will make your heart work harder and get stronger. Some ideas include brisk walking, dancing, and sports like cycling, football, and tennis.



4 RECHARGE WITH QUALITY REST

Too much or too little sleep can be harmful to your cardiovascular system. Your heart needs sleep to help regulate blood pressure and repair itself. You should aim for 7 to 9 hours of sleep. If you are looking to improve the quality of your sleep, focus on creating a bedtime routine that does not include screens, like phones or a TV.



5 SKIP SMOKING

It takes the average person 8-11 attempts before they can quit smoking permanently. It is difficult, but there are online resources or community programs that can support you. Read the "Did you know?" on quitting smoking to learn about the benefits that will last you a lifetime.



6 MAKE TIME FOR STRESS RELIEF

Even 5 minutes of an intentional calming activity can lower your stress levels. Effective stress management can help lower your blood pressure, heart rate, and blood cholesterol. If you are looking for stress-relieving activities, try one of these: meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, reading, yoga, or listening to your favourite songs.

It is impossible to improve all aspects of your lifestyle at once. Pick one or two healthy changes that you want to work on, then get started! Your heart will thank you.

MENTAL HEALTH CORNER

Your Heart Under Pressure: The Cost of Unmanaged Stress

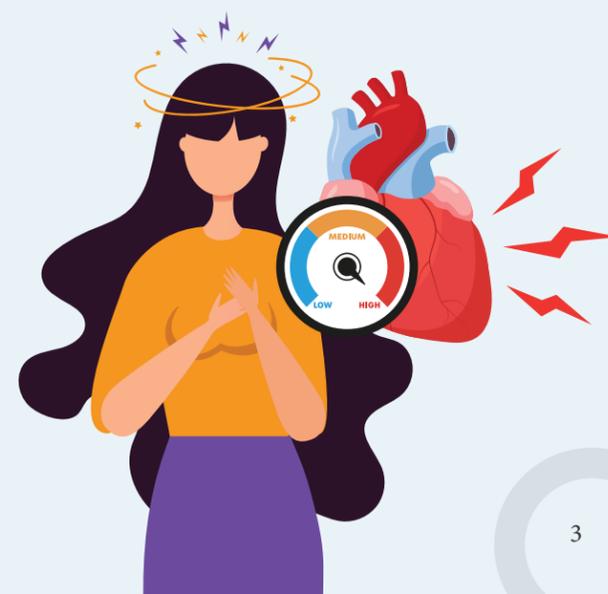
The negative effects of stress are not limited to your mind. Frequent stress can hurt your heart and whole cardiovascular system over time.

When you feel stressed, your body reacts by raising your heart rate and blood pressure. These responses pump more blood to your muscles, preparing them to act. This reaction is helpful when you have an urgent action you need to take. However, it can be unhelpful if there is no immediate threat.

A prolonged stress response can cause damage by putting consistent strain on your cardiovascular system. It is also harder to practice self-control when you are stressed, so

you may be more likely to give into unhealthy cravings like overeating junk food or smoking, which can further harm your heart.

If you are looking to care for your cardiovascular health, do not skip out on stress management. It is essential to find ways to manage stress that work for you. Read the section above, "Make Time for Stress Relief," for some tips on where to start. By taking care of your stress, you are taking care of your heart too.



Identify the Symptoms to Save a Life: HEART ATTACK AND STROKE



Learning to identify the symptoms of a heart attack or stroke could save a life. Minimizing the time to reach emergency medical care is crucial for lowering damage done to the body and increasing chances of survival.

HEART ATTACK

- Discomfort or pain in centre of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back.
- Upper body discomfort or radiating pain in the arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
- Shortness of breath.
- Cold sweats, nausea, or lightheadedness.

Women are less likely to experience chest pain during a heart attack. Do not ignore the other symptoms that may indicate a heart attack.

STROKE

- F FACE**
Test: Ask the person to smile. Is one side of the face drooping or numb?
- A ARM**
Test: Ask the person to lift both arms. See if one drifts down. Is one arm weak or numb?
- S SPEECH**
Test: Give them a simple sentence to repeat back to you. "The grass is green." Is their speech slurred, mixed up, or are they unable to speak?
- T TIME TO CALL 911**
Even if symptoms go away, call 911 and get to the hospital immediately.

Other symptoms of stroke that may be more common in women include trouble seeing, difficulty walking, or severe headaches.

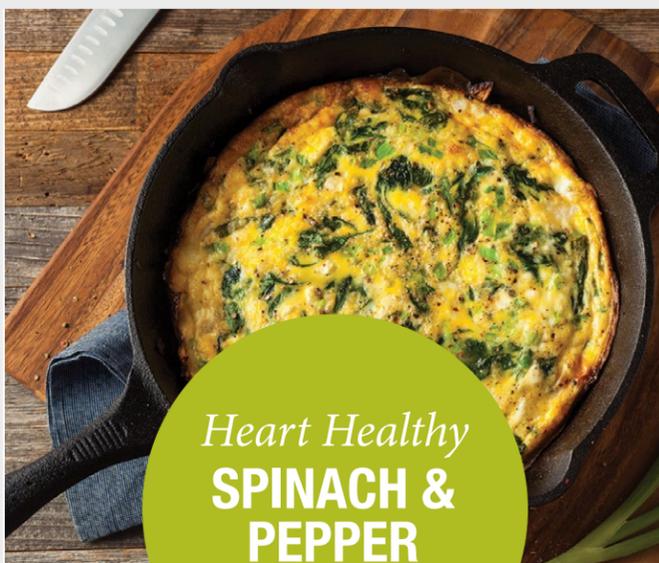
When the signs are not as obvious:

SILENT HEART ATTACKS

Silent heart attacks account for 45% of heart attacks. They are called "silent" because the symptoms are often mild, brief, or completely absent. People may confuse them for heartburn, the flu, or a strained chest muscle. The mildness often leads people to ignore the symptoms and not realize they had a heart attack. However, this does not mean that silent heart attacks are not dangerous.

Having a silent heart attack raises your risk for another heart attack, which could be more severe or even deadly. Silent heart attacks can only be identified with imaging tests of the heart, which will highlight damage. Talk to your doctor if you believe you may have had a silent heart attack, so that you can receive proper treatment. Do not ignore even mild symptoms of a heart attack.

Whether it is a stroke, heart attack, or a silent heart attack, remember and recognize these symptoms to help save your life or someone else's by getting emergency medical care quickly. Do not hesitate and act FAST.



Heart Healthy SPINACH & PEPPER FRITTATA

Looking for a tasty meal with lean protein and a healthy serving of vegetables? Try this recipe for your next dinner!

Recipe adapted from
[Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.](#)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pre-heat your oven broiler.
2. In an ovenproof medium-sized nonstick skillet, cook the spinach over medium heat for 2 minutes or until wilted.
3. Add the red pepper, garlic, and hot pepper flakes to the skillet. Stir to combine. Add oil and cook for 3 minutes or until softened.
4. In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, skim milk, and cheese. Pour into the same skillet and stir to combine. Cook while lifting edges with rubber spatula, letting the runny egg go to the bottom. Continue until edges start to set and most of the egg is cooked.
5. Once oven broiler is hot, place skillet about 4 inches under broiler for about 3 minutes or until top is set and lightly golden. Cut into 4 slices and enjoy!

INGREDIENTS

- 5 oz Baby spinach (washed)
- 1 Red bell pepper (diced)
- 3 Cloves garlic (minced)
- ¼ tsp Hot pepper flakes (optional)
- 2 Extra virgin olive oil
- 5 Eggs
- ⅓ cup Skim milk or water
- 2 tbsp Parmesan cheese (grated)

NUTRITIONAL FACTS

Serving size: 1 slice

144 calories	4 g carbohydrates
10 g protein	1 g fiber
10 g fat	1 g sugars
150 mg sodium	0 g added sugars

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WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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