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# Heart Healthy

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# HEALTHY CHOICES

The wise man advises us  
“above all else, guard your  
heart, for it is the wellspring  
of life” (Proverbs 4:23).



A typical Western  
diet increases risk  
of heart disease  
35 percent.

## Heart Healthy Choices

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

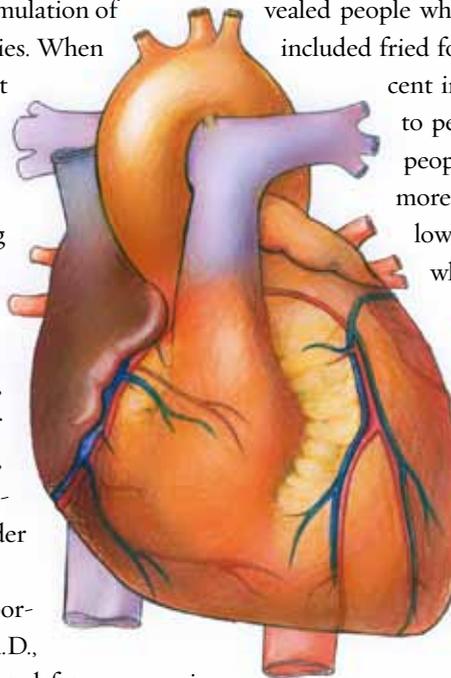
**W**eighing in at only ten ounces, the human heart is a remarkable organ. Beating 100,000 times a day and pumping about 2,000 gallons daily, the heart will beat some 2.5 billion times and pump about 60 million gallons of blood during an 80-year lifespan. Each of us has 60,000 miles of blood vessels to keep open and healthy for the delivery of blood to every cell of the body.

Heart disease, the number one cause of death in the United States, can result from the accumulation of fatty plaque inside the walls of the arteries. When the arteries supplying blood to the heart become blocked, a person experiences a heart attack.

Scientists have discovered many risk factors for heart disease. Knowing your risk factors is an important first step toward lowering your risk for heart disease. The major risk factors include elevated blood lipids, smoking, high blood pressure and obesity. Other significant risk factors include diabetes, inactivity and stress. Aging, a family tendency for heart disease and male gender are also important factors.

The type of fat one consumes is important. Health scientist Ancel Keys, Ph.D., showed us that a high intake of saturated fat was a major factor associated with high blood lipids and elevated risk of heart disease. The major sources of saturated fat in the American diet are meat and dairy products. The saturated fat and cholesterol in meat and dairy products is estimated to be responsible for about 60,000 fatal heart attacks annually.

Data from the recent INTERHEART study (which



analyzed risk factors for heart attack in 52 countries) revealed people who consumed a typical Western diet that included fried foods, salty snacks and meat had a 35 percent increased risk of a heart attack compared to people who did not eat those foods. Also, people who consumed a prudent diet with more fruits and vegetables had a 30 percent lower risk of heart attack compared to people who ate little or no fruits and vegetables.

Adventist men who consumed beef at least three times a week had a 60 to 70 percent increased risk of a fatal heart attack. On the other hand, regular use of nuts and soybeans lowers your risk of heart disease. Several large studies have shown that people with low vitamin D levels are twice as likely to have a heart attack or stroke, compared with those with higher vitamin D levels.

Trans fat provides a double whammy by raising your bad LDL cholesterol and lowering your good HDL cholesterol levels. The major sources of trans fat include French fries, chips, pizza, donuts, vegetable shortenings, Danish pastries and other bakery products that contain hydrogenated vegetable oils.

Winston Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.