

WHAT cardiologists TELL THEIR FRIENDS

TOP HEART SPECIALISTS SHARE THEIR INSIDER KNOWLEDGE WITH LARRAINE SATHICQ

The Experts



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We all know that lifestyle changes like eating well, exercising and not smoking are good for your heart. But imagine if you had easy access to inside tips from a cardiologist about other ways to improve your cardiac health? Here's what some of Australia's top heart specialists tell their friends.

♥ Exercise for fitness, not just to lose weight

Spend three to five hours a week on some type of physical

activity to increase fitness and stay healthy. I would prefer people to carry a little extra weight and exercise regularly than be skinny and inactive. Exercise has huge benefits and not just for your heart. **RW**

♥ Get a flu jab

A recent study of patients at Westmead Hospital suggests the flu vaccine reduces heart attack risk by 45 per cent in people aged 50 to 64. There are two reasons the flu may affect your heart attack risk. It could be that the infection

causes inflammation around arteries that are already narrowed or that having influenza causes your blood to thicken, which can also result in a heart attack. Current recommendations are for people 65 and over to get the vaccine but I think it's a good idea for people between 50 and 64, especially if they have other cardiac risk factors. **PK**

♥ Sleep well

Most of us need seven to eight hours' sleep a night, but instead of obsessing over it if

you're not getting enough, look at the reasons you're still awake. If you're always feeling tired, grumpy or anxious, it may be due to depression, a risk factor for heart disease. Snoring shouldn't be taken lightly either because it could be a sign of obstructive sleep apnoea, which sees sufferers stop breathing long enough to wake up briefly – and in some people it happens hundreds of times a night. Sleep apnoea has also been associated with increased risk for heart disease. **DC**



♥ Heart disease kills women too.

In fact, it's the number one killer of women. It even surprises some medical friends that women are four times more likely to die from heart disease than breast cancer. And 10 to 15 years after menopause, more women are having heart attacks than men. There's nothing magical to stop you getting heart disease but if you're at high risk, tests can show if you need medication as well as lifestyle changes. **MA**

♥ Amp up your next workout.

If you already exercise regularly, consider adding some high-intensity interval exercises to your routine. This type of exercise increases your heart rate, boosts fitness, burns fat and improves cholesterol levels after a workout. **FF**

♥ Know your cardiac calcium score.

This simple test measures the amount of calcium in the coronary arteries. It's non-invasive, there's no dye involved, and it is the best predictor of cardiovascular risk. This test is particularly important for people with cardiac risk factors including diabetes, smoking, hypertension, high cholesterol, and family history. **RW** ▶



LEARN HOW HEART ATTACKS CAN BE DIFFERENT FOR WOMEN. KERRY DOYLE OF THE HEART FOUNDATION TALKS ABOUT WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR. Download the free **viewa** app then select the *Good Health* channel and hold your phone or tablet over this page to listen.



♥ **Whatever you eat, choose quality over quantity.**

I tell my friends not to be so worried about always choosing low-fat foods. Instead, eat more naturally – what I like to call a low-HI (human interference) diet – in smaller portions and never say yes to second helpings of anything. It's okay to be hungry too. You can put up with a bit of hunger until the next mealtime and it's much better than grazing between meals. **RW**

♥ **Watch out for depression.**

Even trained medical professionals can miss the signs of depression and anxiety, both of which increase your risk of heart disease. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness or an admission of failure. These are common conditions but there are effective treatments available. If you experience persistent low moods, feel fatigued or have trouble sleeping, it's worth seeing your doctor and asking the question: 'Do

you think I might have depression?' Or assess your own risk profile online with the free Beyond Blue two-minute Anxiety and Depression Checklist. Access the test at beyondblue.org.au. **DC**

♥ **Don't be complacent just because you're slim.**

Heart disease doesn't only strike the overweight or unfit. You should still have regular checks for blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels because if your numbers are too high you might not find out until the damage to your arteries is done. Start early so you can take action to help prevent a heart attack or stroke. **FT** ☺

♥ **You can have too much of a good thing.**

Physical activity is important to heart health but extreme exercise like ultra-marathons or extended endurance courses are not the best thing for your cardiovascular health. We often hear of people who see themselves as super fit and low risk for a heart attack dropping dead as a result of vigorous exercise. I would advise anyone considering signing on for a physically punishing challenge not to push themselves past their limit, especially if they're over 40. If you're determined to give it a try, have a health check with a cardiologist well before the event. **DC**

♥ **Everything in moderation (except smoking).**

My friends are mostly non-smokers, so I don't have to tell them it's the worst thing you can do for your heart. A drink or two is OK as there is evidence that a glass of red wine can help lower blood pressure. But any more can actually increase your blood pressure and too much alcohol is toxic to the heart muscle. **FT**

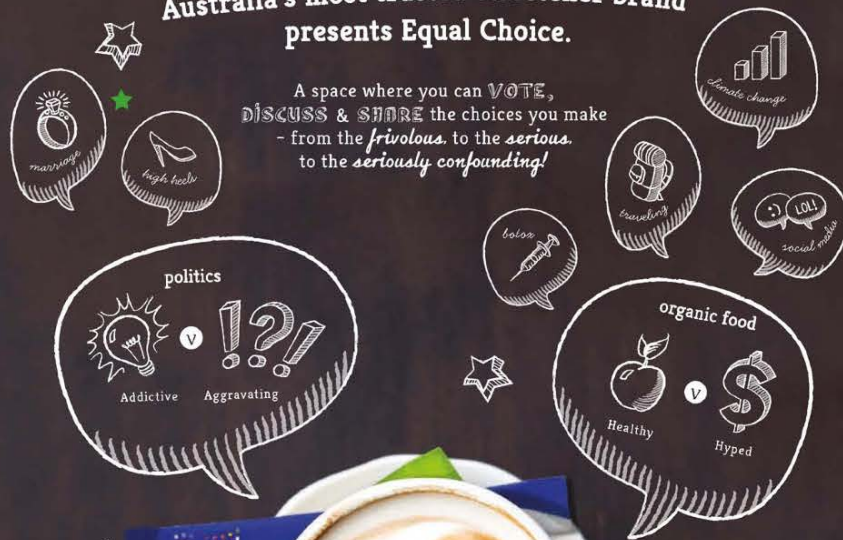
♥ **Know the signs.**

Heart symptoms can be different for women and won't necessarily include chest pain. So if you're experiencing clamminess, shortness of breath or suddenly feeling terribly unwell, get medical help immediately. **MA**

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