

# Don't Pay the Ultimate Price For Ignoring Your Arteries

By Joe Decker

Atherosclerosis is what our parents and grandparents used to call hardening of the arteries. It involves the gradual deposit of fatty substances called plaque along the inside of our arteries. As plaque builds up over the years, it can result in blocking the blood supply to one or more parts of the body.

Yet only about half of Americans understand how dangerous atherosclerosis really is, according to a recent Harris survey. Part of the reason is that most people don't experience any symptoms until it's too late. Heart attacks kill 600,000 Americans every year.

That's the bad news. The good news is that atherosclerosis is also highly preventable. Here are some simple steps you can take to reduce your risk:

**1. Get fit:** A great starting point is getting up off the couch and exercise. While it may be tempting to just dive into a new workout routine, you should always check with your doctor to make sure your training plan is right for your current medical condition. Depending on your personal situation and general health, your doctor might recommend a program specifically geared to weight loss, building muscle mass or improving tone.

**2. Make necessary lifestyle changes:** Lifestyle changes can be difficult because they often involve changing or eliminating certain things we really enjoy. I love Mexican food, but I also know that if I don't moderate my intake, I could be facing weight gain issues.

There are other lifestyle changes you can make to reduce your risk of atherosclerosis. Quitting smoking is always in season. And keeping an eye on your LDL cholesterol is another way to good heart health. (LDL cholesterol is the "bad" cholesterol that can result in more plaque deposits in your arteries. It only takes a little bit of homework to make sure your diet is low in cholesterol.)

**3. Talk with your doctor:** Sometimes, you need a little more than diet or exercise to maintain proper heart health. Sometimes it's genetic and there is not a lot you can do about it. In those cases, there are a number of medications you can discuss with your doctor that can slow down the process of hardening arteries.

A simple aspirin can reduce the chance of blood clots formed by platelets that can clump together in the bloodstream. Some statins have even been shown to slow the progression

of atherosclerosis. There also are anticoagulants like heparin or warfarin that can thin your blood, thereby helping prevent clots.

Remember there is no magic bullet when it comes to keeping your heart muscle and cardiovascular system in good shape. A combination of appropriate lifestyle changes and talking with your doctor about diet, exercise and the use of medications can put you – and keep you – on the road to maintaining a strong and healthy heart.

For more information about heart health, go to:

Us against Athero: [www.athero.com](http://www.athero.com)

American Heart Association:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4440>

Mayo Clinic: [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

Healthology: <http://www.healthology.com/>

WebMD: <http://www.webmd.com>

*Joe Decker is recognized as "The Worlds Fittest Man" because he is an ultra-endurance power athlete, renowned fitness trainer, motivational author and speaker who has helped thousands of women, men, children and seniors get into shape and lose weight.*

*Once overweight and out-of-shape, Joe transformed his body and his life through an amazing journey from fat-to-fit. In 2000, Joe broke the **Guinness World Records®** 24-hour Physical Fitness Challenge to help inspire and motivate people to get fit. He recently authored the book, *The World's Fittest You*, which outlines how anyone can get on the road to a lifetime of physical fitness with hard work and discipline.*