The American Heart Association recently reported that the death rate from cardiovascular disease has fallen more than 30 percent over the last decade, due to better treatment for heart attack, congestive heart failure and other heart disease. But this care comes at a cost: expenditures for the care for heart disease rose to more than $315 billion during the same decade. And heart disease continues to be the number one killer in the U.S. Every 39 seconds, someone dies of cardiovascular disease.

Education is the first step to lowering the risk of heart disease. Start by taking this short quiz to see how much you know about taking care of your heart. (*Answers appear below.*)

**True or False?**

1. The heart is a muscle.

2. Many diseases and conditions can contribute to the risk of heart disease.

3. A heart attack always begins with sharp chest pain.

4. The best thing to do if you experience heart attack symptoms is to call 911 right away.

5. Women need to worry more about breast cancer than about heart disease.

6. Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your heart.

7. If you have a family history of heart disease, you have exactly the same risk yourself.

8. High blood cholesterol is one of the top risk factors for heart attack.
9. As we grow older, it’s best to rest as much as possible.

10. Even a person who has suffered a heart attack should exercise.

11. It’s possible to eat a “heart smart” diet even if you dine out often.

12. Emotional stress and anxiety can worsen a heart condition.

Answers to “Test Your Heart Health IQ”:

1. The heart is a muscle.
   
   TRUE—The heart is the hardest working muscle in the body, pumping enough blood in your lifetime to fill a supertanker!

2. Many diseases and conditions can contribute to the risk of heart disease.
   
   TRUE—A number of conditions—including hypertension (high blood pressure), high cholesterol and diabetes— increase the risk of heart disease.

3. A heart attack always begins with sharp chest pain.
   
   FALSE—A heart attack can begin slowly, with subtle signals. Symptoms can include:
   • a feeling of pressure or discomfort in the chest
   • discomfort in the arms, neck, back, jaw or stomach
   • shortness of breath
   • nausea, dizziness, sweating for no reason
   • fatigue and lack of energy

4. The best thing to do if you experience heart attack symptoms is to call 911 right away.
   
   TRUE—“Better safe than sorry” is very true when it comes to heart attack. Excellent treatments are now available, and the sooner treatment begins, the better the chance of saving the patient’s life and preventing disability. If you experience chest pain, especially if associated with any other of the signs listed above, call 911 right away. Acting quickly can save your life.

5. Women need to worry more about breast cancer than about heart disease.
   
   FALSE—Women are far more likely to die of cardiovascular disease than from breast cancer. It is a myth that heart disease is primarily a men’s health problem. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women—and more women than men die within one year of a heart attack.

6. Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your heart.
   
   TRUE—Smoking is one of the top risk factors for heart disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), cigarette smokers are up to four times more likely to develop heart disease. And even if you don’t smoke, exposure to secondhand smoke may raise your risk by up to 30%.
7. If you have a family history of heart disease, you have exactly the same risk yourself.
   FALSE—Although your risk increases if a family member was diagnosed with heart disease, it’s not all in the genes! A healthy lifestyle can cut your risk. Obesity and inactivity are greater risk factors than genetic inheritance for most people. Here are the steps to take to lower the risk:
   • If you smoke, quit.
   • Take steps to lower blood pressure and cholesterol level.
   • Increase physical activity.
   • Maintain a healthy weight.
   • If you are diabetic, follow your care plan.

8. High blood cholesterol is one of the top risk factors for heart attack.
   TRUE—Lowering your cholesterol level through diet and lifestyle changes (and in some cases, medication) can cut your risk.

9. As we grow older, it’s best to rest as much as possible.
   FALSE—The older you are, the more important regular physical exercise is to your well-being. Inactivity can lead to a downward spiral of decline. Ask your healthcare provider about an exercise program that’s right for you.

10. Even a person who has suffered a heart attack should exercise.
   TRUE—For most patients, preventing another heart attack will include a cardiac rehabilitation program. Be sure you discuss your workout regimen with your healthcare provider and follow his or her instructions.

11. It’s possible to eat a “heart smart” diet even if you dine out often.
   TRUE—Most menus feature at least a few low-fat, low-cholesterol, low-sodium items. Avoid fried foods, instead selecting baked or broiled. (If you aren’t sure how a dish is prepared, ask your server.) Skip dessert, and order your salad with low-fat dressing served on the side.

12. Emotional stress and anxiety can worsen a heart condition.
   TRUE—Stressful emotions can raise your blood pressure, causing your heart to work harder. Lifestyle changes and relaxation techniques help lessen the effects of stress.