



## 4 out of 5 Americans Have ‘Suboptimal’ Heart Health, American Heart Association Says in New Report

By Michelle McCarthy  
July 08 2022

Just 1 in 5 people in the United States have optimal cardiovascular health, while 4 out of 5 have suboptimal (“low” or “moderate”) cardiovascular health, according to a [recent study](#) published in the American Heart Association’s scientific journal *Circulation*.

The AHA also published an updated [Life’s Essential 8](#), a checklist for measuring and monitoring cardiovascular health. The list is composed of eight health behaviors and factors: diet, physical activity, nicotine exposure, body mass index, cholesterol, blood sugar, average blood pressure, and the newest category, sleep duration, which was not included in the AHA’s Life’s Simple 7 checklist, introduced in 2010.

“These data represent the first look at the cardiovascular health of the U.S. population using the AHA’s new ... scoring algorithm,” says Donald M. Lloyd-Jones, MD, ScM, FAHA, the president of the AHA and lead author of the study.

Cardiovascular health was calculated by adding scores for all categories on the checklist and then dividing by eight to come up with a final score that ranges from 0–100. Scores of less than 50 were deemed as indicating “low” cardiovascular health, 50 to 79 were regarded as “moderate,” and 80 and above were considered to have “high” cardiovascular health.

### Concerning Results

These measures revealed the concerning state of Americans’ cardiovascular health, as 80% of participants had low to moderate cardiovascular health. U.S. adults scored the lowest in the categories of diet, physical activity, and body mass index. “Overall, the cardiovascular health of the U.S. population is suboptimal, and we see important differences across age and sociodemographic groups,” Lloyd-Jones says.

For example, adult women had higher cardiovascular health scores, with an average of 67, compared with men, who scored an average of 62.5. Asian Americans had higher average cardiovascular health scores than all other racial/ethnic groups. Non-Hispanic white participants had the second-highest average cardiovascular health score, followed by Hispanic (non-Mexican), Mexican, and Non-Hispanic Black individuals.

“Analyses like this can help policymakers, communities, clinicians, and the public to understand the opportunities to intervene to improve and maintain optimal cardiovascular health across the life course,” Lloyd-Jones says.

The AHA also released a report [earlier this year](#) that noted 1 in 4 American adults are at increased risk for heart disease due to fatty liver disease, a condition that often goes undiagnosed.

Heart disease—the leading cause of death in the United States—has been strongly linked to lifestyle factors, [particularly diet](#). A number of studies, including one [published in \*The Journal of the American Heart Association\*](#) in 2019, have found that people who eat more plant-based foods and fewer animal products are less likely to develop and die of heart disease.

*To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#). For meal-planning support, check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK’s easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.*