

[IMAGE]

It's Time to Test Your Heart Health (and Improve It at the Same Time)

By Editorial Staff

Heart health is no laughing matter, and yet too many people seem to be giggling as they progressively put their heart at risk. Whether from poor diet, lack of exercise, constant stress or a combination of these and other risky lifestyle behaviors, we rush headlong toward a major heart condition (cardiovascular disease) or event (heart attack, stroke, heart failure).

We can't fix what's wrong without first determining the extent to which it's wrong, so let's take this simple test to evaluate your heart health. Unless you live and work in single-story buildings, the key to the test is only a few steps away.

Yes, we're talking about stairs, and research presented at the scientific congress of the European Society of Cardiology suggests the time it takes to climb four flights (approximately 60 stairs total) can serve as an accurate predictor of heart health. The study included 165 patients experiencing symptoms suggestive of coronary artery disease (chest pain or shortness of breath with exertion) and referred for exercise testing. Patients walked on a treadmill, increasing their intensity until exhaustion, to determine their exercise capacity (metabolic equivalents or METs). After a 15-20-minute rest, patients climbed four flights of stairs at a fast pace and without stopping.

heart health - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Researchers then analyzed the relationship between treadmill-generated METs and the time to ascend four flights of stairs, finding the following:

- Patients who completed the four flights in less than 45 seconds achieved 9-10 METs.
- Patients who took 1.5 minutes or longer to climb the four flights achieved fewer than 8 METs.

Why is the above significant? Because research shows that achieving 10 METs during an exercise test suggests a reduced risk of mortality (1 percent or less per year), whereas 8 or fewer METs on the same test reflects an increased mortality rate (2-4 percent per year).

The great thing about climbing stairs is that it's not only a great way to measure your heart health; it's also a great way to improve your heart health. Now that's a win-win. So find yourself four flights of stairs and test (and improve) your heart health today!

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