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Most US Adults Have Hearts Older Than Their Actual Age

Analysis by Dr. Joseph Mercola | September 12, 2025

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most American adults live with a heart age older than their actual age, which silently raises the risk of heart disease, stroke, and early death long before symptoms appear
- On average, women's hearts are about four years older than their bodies, while men's are nearly seven years older, with many carrying a cardiovascular risk a full decade beyond their real age
- The burden of accelerated heart aging is heavier among people with lower income, less education, and minority backgrounds, widening health gaps across communities
- Researchers developed an online calculator that translates complex health data into an easy-to-understand "heart age," helping you see if your heart is aging faster than the rest of your body
- You can take practical steps to rewind your heart age by eliminating vegetable oils, eating enough healthy carbs, walking daily, getting safe sun exposure, and testing for insulin resistance

Your heart could be older than you think. Even if you feel fine, hidden wear and tear inside your cardiovascular system often builds long before symptoms surface. When that happens, the risks of heart disease, stroke, and early death rise sharply, leaving many people unaware until serious problems develop.

An "older" heart doesn't announce itself in dramatic ways at first. The early warning signs often look like everyday issues — blood pressure creeping up, weight that's harder to manage, fatigue that lingers, or blood sugar that becomes harder to control. Over time, these small shifts accelerate the aging of your arteries and raise the likelihood of sudden cardiac events.

The burden of early heart aging doesn't fall evenly. People with lower income, less education, or from racial and ethnic minority groups face some of the steepest gaps between biological heart age and their actual years of life. That imbalance makes prevention and awareness even more urgent, because the consequences reach beyond individual health and touch entire communities.

Understanding why heart age matters is the first step. By looking at how researchers measure it and what their findings reveal, you can see how this concept reshapes the way we think about cardiovascular risk and why it deserves your attention now.

Research Shows Americans Are Living with Older Hearts Than Their Age

A study in JAMA Cardiology introduced new formulas to calculate something called "risk age" in adults, which makes it easier to understand your chance of heart problems.[1] Risk age compares the health of your heart to your chronological age — the actual number of years you've been alive.

Instead of being told you have a certain percentage chance of developing heart disease, you learn whether your heart is younger, the same, or older than your real age. This gives you a clear way to see if your heart is aging faster than the rest of your body.

- **The researchers analyzed health data from 14,140 adults across the U.S. —** Everyone was between 30 and 79 years old, and none had a prior history of heart disease. When those numbers were applied to the new formulas, the results represented about 138 million American adults — and they revealed just how much faster our hearts are aging compared to the rest of our bodies.

- **Most Americans have older hearts than they realize —** On average, women's hearts came in about four years older than their chronological age, while men's averaged nearly seven years older. More than one-third of women and over half of men had a heart age at least five years older than their actual age.

  Even more concerning, about 1 in 6 women and 1 in 4 men had a heart that was more than a full decade older. Imagine being 45 years old but carrying the cardiovascular risk of someone in their mid-50s — that's the reality many people are living with today.

- **Some groups carried an even heavier burden —** The gap between heart age and body age wasn't distributed evenly. People with less education, lower income, or from minority backgrounds were far more likely to show accelerated heart aging.

  For example, nearly one-third of men and nearly one-quarter of women with only a high school education or less had hearts that were at least 10 years older than their actual age. Non-Hispanic Black adults and Hispanic adults also had larger average gaps compared to non-Hispanic White adults.

- **Risk age makes the numbers real —** Instead of telling you that your 10-year risk of heart disease is a certain percentage, these new equations translate your risk into something everyone understands — age. In other words, if your health markers are off, your "heart age" jumps ahead. Hearing that your heart is 10 years older than your body creates a wake-up call that abstract percentages rarely do.

- **A calculator makes it personal —** To make their findings practical, the team created an online calculator where anyone can plug in their numbers and see their PREVENT risk age.[2] This tool gives you one way to measure where you stand and track progress over time, however it includes some markers that aren't ideal for measuring heart risks, like **total cholesterol**.

  In the pursuit of optimal health, remember that there are many **important health tests** that enable early detection of diseases to improve longevity.

How to Rewind Your Heart Age and Restore Energy at the Cellular Level

You don't have to accept an older heart age as your destiny. The real problem isn't just your blood pressure or cholesterol — it's the hidden damage happening deep inside your cells.

When your mitochondria, the energy factories in your body, are overloaded by toxic fats and modern habits, your heart wears out faster than it should. The good news is you can take specific steps to reverse that damage and bring your heart age closer to your real age. These steps work because they address the root cause of the problem, not just the surface-level symptoms.

1. **Eliminate linoleic acid (LA) from your diet —** If you only make one change, let it be this. LA from vegetable oils is the most damaging ingredient in ultraprocessed foods, fried foods, and even so-called "healthy" organic snacks. It breaks down your mitochondrial membranes and makes your heart age faster. Start by removing vegetable oils — like corn, soybean, canola, sunflower, and safflower — from your kitchen. Replace them with stable fats like grass fed butter, ghee, and beef tallow.

   Assume restaurant meals are cooked in vegetable oil unless the chef has confirmed otherwise. Track your LA intake using an app like Food Buddy in my Health Coach, which is coming out this year. Aim for under 5 grams a day, with under 2 grams being even better.

2. **Eat enough healthy carbs every day —** If you've been on a low-carb or keto diet, your mitochondria are likely starving of their preferred fuel: glucose. Restricting carbs forces your body into emergency energy pathways that make oxidative stress worse. Instead, aim for around 250 grams of healthy carbs daily, and more if you're active.

Choose fruits and white rice first, then gradually add in root vegetables, non-starchy vegetables, starchy vegetables like squash or sweet potatoes, beans and legumes, and finally minimally processed whole grains — only if your gut can handle them.

3. **Walk at least an hour each day —** Movement is nonnegotiable if you want to reset your metabolism and lower your heart age. Walking isn't just exercise — it's a metabolic treatment. It improves circulation, helps clear toxins, balances blood sugar, and boosts mitochondrial energy production. If you're sedentary, start small. Take a 10-minute walk after meals to blunt blood sugar spikes.

   Over time, build up to 60 minutes a day. If you're outdoors in natural light while you do it, the benefits are even greater.

4. **Get daily sunlight, but avoid peak hours until you cut vegetable oils —** Sunlight restores energy production inside your cells. It triggers nitric oxide to lower blood pressure, sets your circadian rhythm, and boosts melatonin production in your mitochondria, protecting your heart against oxidative stress. But if your body is full of LA from years of vegetable oil consumption, your skin burns easily.

   That's why I recommend limiting direct sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. until you've been off vegetable oils for at least six months. Focus instead on morning and late afternoon light. Once your tissues are free from these unstable fats, you'll tolerate more sun safely, and your body will thrive on the energy it provides.

5. **Test for insulin resistance with HOMA-IR —** Recognizing insulin resistance early is essential, as it's a warning sign for your metabolic health. The HOMA-IR (Homeostatic Model Assessment of Insulin Resistance) test is a valuable diagnostic tool that helps assess insulin resistance through a simple blood test, so you can spot issues early and make necessary lifestyle changes.

   Created in 1985, it calculates the relationship between your fasting glucose and insulin levels to evaluate how effectively your body uses insulin. Unlike other more complex tests, HOMA-IR requires just one fasting blood sample, making it both

practical and accessible. The HOMA-IR formula is as follows:

HOMA-IR = (Fasting Glucose x Fasting Insulin) / 405, where

- Fasting glucose is measured in mg/dL
- Fasting insulin is measured in μIU/mL (microinternational units per milliliter)
- 405 is a constant that normalizes the values

If you're using mmol/L for glucose instead of mg/dL, the formula changes slightly:

HOMA-IR = (Fasting Glucose x Fasting Insulin) / 22.5, where

- Fasting glucose is measured in mmol/L
- Fasting insulin is measured in μIU/mL
- 22.5 is the normalizing factor for this unit of measurement

Anything below 1.0 is considered a healthy HOMA-IR score. If you're above that, you're considered insulin resistant. The higher your values, the greater your insulin resistance. Conversely the lower your HOMA-IR score, the less insulin resistance you have, assuming you are not a Type 1 diabetic who makes no insulin.

Interestingly, my personal HOMA-IR score stands at a low 0.2. This low score is a testament to my body's enhanced efficiency in burning fuel, a result of increased glucose availability. By incorporating additional carbohydrates into my diet, I provided my cells with the necessary energy to operate more effectively.

This improved cellular function has significantly boosted my metabolic health, demonstrating how strategic dietary adjustments lead to better insulin sensitivity and overall metabolic performance.

FAQs About Heart Age

Q: What does it mean if my heart age is older than my actual age?

A: It means your cardiovascular system is aging faster than the rest of your body. Even if you feel fine, an older heart age signals higher risk of heart disease, stroke, and early death years before symptoms appear.

Q: How do researchers calculate heart age or "risk age"?

A: Scientists use health markers like blood pressure, HDL cholesterol, smoking status, and kidney function to calculate risk age. Instead of just percentages, they translate your numbers into the "age" of your heart compared to your real age — making the risk easier to understand.

Q: How common is an older heart age in the U.S.?

A: Very common. A study found that most American adults have hearts older than their bodies.[3] On average, women's hearts were about four years older, while men's were nearly seven years older. Overall, 1 in 4 men and 1 in 6 women had hearts at least 10 years older than their actual age.

Q: Who is most affected by accelerated heart aging?

A: The burden falls hardest on people with lower income, less education, and minority backgrounds. For example, nearly one-third of men with only a high school education had hearts 10 years older than their chronological age. Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic adults also showed larger gaps compared to White adults.

Q: What can I do to lower my heart age?

A: You can take steps to address the root causes of accelerated heart aging. These include removing harmful vegetable oils — high in LA — from your diet, eating enough healthy carbs for energy, walking daily, getting safe sunlight exposure, and testing for insulin resistance with HOMA-IR to catch early metabolic problems.

Sources and References

- [1, 3] JAMA Cardiology July 30, 2025
- [2] PREVENT Risk Age Calculator