



When you think of a **heart**, what comes to mind? Do you think of valentines and cupids? Although your heart doesn't actually make you fall in love, it does have an important job—it keeps blood moving through your body!

Every *cell* in your body needs *nutrients* and *oxygen* to function. Cells also make wastes, such as *carbon dioxide*, that must be removed. Your **cardiovascular system** helps these things happen. Your **blood** delivers nutrients and oxygen to cells. It takes wastes away from them. Your heart helps blood move. It pumps blood through **blood vessels** to all the cells in your body. Then the blood returns to the heart. This movement of blood is called **circulation**. Let's take a closer look at the heart and see how it keeps you ticking!

Your heart is a muscular **organ** about the size of your fist. When it **expands**, it fills with blood. When it *contracts*, or squeezes, it pushes blood out into blood vessels. Imagine squeezing a bottle of ketchup. When you press the sides in, the ketchup moves out. This is kind of like your heart pushing out blood.

Your heart is responsible for bringing nutrients to all the cells in your body. It is also responsible for pumping blood to your lungs so the blood can drop off wastes, such as carbon dioxide, and pick up the oxygen your cells need. Whenever your heart pumps blood away from it, either to your body or to the lungs, it pumps blood into **arteries**. Whenever blood returns to the heart, it returns through vessels called **veins**.

Do you ever think about making your heart beat? Your heart beats day and night, whether you are awake or asleep. Your heartbeat is automatic. This is very important because in order to stay healthy, your heart needs to beat regularly all the time.

Your heart began to beat even before you were born. And it will continue to beat for your entire life. For the average person, that's over 2 billion heartbeats!



Your heart is an important part of your cardiovascular system.