



Healthy Heart Tips to Try Today

Heart disease is one of the major killers today. But it doesn't have to be that way—heart disease is largely preventable through healthy lifestyle choices. It's important to remember that the choices you make in your everyday life have direct ramifications on your health, especially your heart. Because your heart serves such a critical function, taking care of it becomes all the more important to your overall health. Fortunately, there are a number of ways you can take your health into your own hands with these healthy heart tips:

- **Get active each week.**

A healthy heart is one that gets exercised. Physical activity is essential to heart health. The Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week for good heart health. Whether you walk or run, play sports or swim, make sure you build enough active minutes into your week. It doesn't have to be a chore—find a physical activity you enjoy and just stick with it.

- **Enjoy healthy fats, avoid unhealthy ones.**

Fat is fat, right? Not so fast. Foods actually contain healthy fats and unhealthy ones. Good fats from vegetables, nuts, seeds and fish can reduce the risk of heart disease, lower bad cholesterol and increase good cholesterol. Some fats, such as omega-3 fats, can even help heart muscles beat in a steady rhythm. Focus on the ones in foods like fish, nuts, avocado and olive oil. Limit your added fats, too, by trimming dressings, spreads, sauces and fried foods from your diet whenever you can.

- **Snap out of a sedentary lifestyle.**

Even if you exercise, long bouts of sedentary time can hurt your heart health. Sedentary activities can include things such as working on a computer, watching television or reading. Studies suggest that sedentary behavior may be associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and an overall higher risk of death from any cause. To avoid sedentary periods, get active in your free time. Build movement into your everyday activities and take frequent breaks to stretch your legs if you work at a desk.

- **Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke.**

Smoking is known to be detrimental to your health, but did you know it's also bad for your heart? Studies suggest smoking is a major cause of coronary heart disease, which can lead to heart attacks. Smoking leads to a buildup of fatty substances in the arteries, which is a chief contributor to deaths from smoking. Secondhand smoke is also linked to cardiovascular disease.

- **Shed excess weight.**

Excess weight is an enemy to your heart health—bringing with it a slew of health risks. Being overweight puts extra pressure on your arterial walls and forces your heart to work harder. It also puts you at risk for developing other diseases, such as atherosclerosis, which can lead to hypertension, cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and stroke.

Studies suggest that excess weight around the middle puts your heart health at risk. Excess belly fat correlates with higher blood pressure and cholesterol levels, two key risks to the health of your heart.

- **Catch your zs.**

You may be surprised to learn that sleep is essential to your heart health. That's because deep sleep allows the body to go into periods of lowered blood pressure and heart rate. Regardless of age, weight or smoking habits, people who are sleep deprived are at a higher risk for cardiovascular disease.

- **Eat cholesterol-friendly foods.**

High levels of bad cholesterol threaten the health of your heart. Limit the amount of foods that contain saturated fats, which can increase your cholesterol. These include butter, lard, fatty meats and full-fat dairy products. Instead, support your diet with foods that can naturally lower your cholesterol.

- **Take care of your teeth.**

The heart is tied to many functions of the body and can be affected by many seemingly unrelated functions. You may be surprised to hear that your heart health can be compromised by poor dental hygiene. Studies show a link between the bacteria that causes gum disease and increased risk of heart disease. Taking care of your teeth and keeping gum disease at bay also reduces the body's inflammatory response. Inflammation in the body can cause a buildup of substances in the blood that can worsen heart disease. So, be sure to brush at least twice a day and don't forget to floss.