

Building Heart Health

By Carol Ann Marlow, MPH, MS, and Don Hall, DrPH, CHES

Experts agree that building a healthy heart should include many strategies. Here are some suggestions that can help keep your heart beating for a full lifetime.

Make physical activity a regular part of the day

Choose activities you enjoy and can do regularly. Fit activity into a daily routine – take a brisk 10-minute walk to and from the parking lot, bus stop, or subway station. Try something different on alternate days, but be active most days of the week. For example, to reach a 30-minute goal for the day, walk the dog for 10 minutes before and after work and add a 10-minute walk at lunchtime. Or, swim 3 times a week and take a yoga class on the other days. Do at least 10 minutes of the activity at a time. Shorter bursts of activity will not have the same health benefits. To be ready anytime, keep comfortable clothes and a pair of walking or running shoes in the car and at the office.

To increase physical activity at home:

- **Join a walking group in your area.** Recruit a partner for support and encouragement.
- **Push the baby in a stroller.**
- **Walk, skate, or cycle more and drive less.**
- **Do stretches or pedal a stationary bike while watching television.**
- **Mow the lawn with a push mower.**
- **Plant and care for a vegetable or flower garden.**
- **Get the family involved** – ride bikes, tumble in the leaves, build a snowman, splash in a puddle, or dance to favorite music.



Don't Smoke

Avoid secondhand smoke. *If you smoke, quit!* After you stop, your heart immediately begins to grow stronger and within as little as 2 years your risk of a heart attack is nearly the same as a non-smoker.

Eating Habits

Most Americans eat a diet high in saturated fat, cholesterol, salt, and calories and low in plant-based foods. Change the balance! Eat more plant-based foods – fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. They're colorful and tasty if you season them instead of smother them with butter and salt.

Here are some examples.

Eat more fruit:

- Aim for 2+ cups daily – melons, berries, apples, bananas, oranges, papaya,



Eat more vegetables at meals:

- Aim for 2.5 cups daily.
- Eat more salads and vegetable soups.
- Shred carrots or zucchini into meatloaf, casseroles, quick breads, and muffins.
- Include chopped vegetables in pasta sauce or lasagna.
- Eat more steamed vegetables and stir fry.
- Grill vegetable kabobs with a barbecue meal. Try tomatoes, mushrooms, green peppers, and onions.

Use whole grains most of the time:

- Experiment by substituting whole wheat or oat flour for $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ of the flour in pancake, waffle, muffin, cookie, or other flour-based recipes.
- Use whole-grain bread or cracker crumbs in meatloaf.
- Try rolled oats or a crushed, unsweetened whole grain cereal as breading for baked chicken, fish, veal cutlets, or eggplant parmesan.
- Try an unsweetened, whole grain ready-to-eat cereal as croutons in salad or in place of crackers with soup.
- Snack on ready-to-eat, whole grain cereals such as toasted oat cereal.
- Try a whole-grain snack such as baked tortilla chips or hearty rye crisp.



Use dry beans, peas, and nuts daily:

Choose dry beans as a main dish or as part of a meal.

Some choices are:

- Chili with kidney or pinto beans
- Stir-fried tofu
- Split pea, lentil, minestrone, or white bean soups
- Baked beans
- Black bean enchiladas
- Garbanzo or kidney beans on a chef's salad
- Rice and beans
- Veggie burgers or garden burgers
- Hummus (chickpeas) spread on pita bread

Choose nuts as a snack, on salads, or in main dishes. Some ideas are:

- Sprinkle pine nuts on pesto sauce for pasta.
- Add slivered almonds to steamed vegetables.
- Add toasted peanuts or cashews to a vegetable stir fry.
- Sprinkle a few nuts on top of low-fat ice cream or frozen yogurt.
- Add walnuts or pecans to a green salad instead of cheese or meat.
- Eat fish more often, especially those rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, trout, and herring.

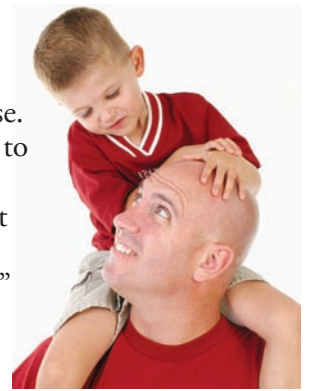


Choose healthy fats:

- Choose vegetable oils (Canola, soy, olive, etc.) and trans-fat free margarine in place of butter and solid or saturated fats. Eat all fats in moderate amounts.
- Olives, avocados, nuts, seeds, fish, and flax meal are foods that contain healthy fats.
- Limit foods high in saturated fat such as red meats, hamburgers, hot dogs, luncheon meats, bacon, fried chicken (baked, skinless poultry is preferable).
- Go easy on cheese, cream, premium ice creams, rich desserts, butter, meat gravies and sauces.

Develop Good Coping Strategies

In a recent large international heart study, persons with high stress levels at work or home had higher rates of heart disease. Learn good coping techniques to minimize this risk.

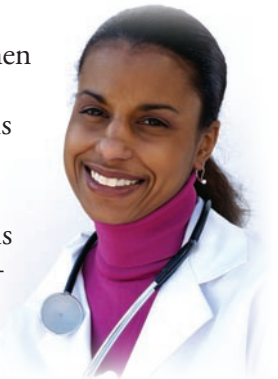


- **Limit your stress load.** Don't over commit. Learn to say "No" and "I need more help." Get adequate rest daily.
- **Break the stress response with moderate physical activity.** Do something fun and relaxing every day.
- **Develop a good support system.** Nurture relationships with family and friends you can talk out problems with and get help from when needed.

Know Your Heart Risk Numbers

Get regular checkups by your doctor and know what your results should be. If high, take recommended action to reduce your risk. Aim for these test values:

- Total cholesterol less than 200 mg/dL (LDL cholesterol less than 130 mg/dL, 100 mg/dL or less is ideal)
- HDL cholesterol at least 45 for men and 55 for women; 60 mg/dL or higher is ideal. HDL cholesterol is protective, so higher numbers are desirable.
- Blood pressure less than 120/80 is ideal. Blood pressures of 140/90+ are high risk.
- Fasting blood sugar less than 100 mg/dL. A fasting blood sugar of 126 mg/dL indicates diabetes and high risk for heart problems.



Joining a healthy lifestyle with good medical care can help keep your heart beating strong. Remember, if you take good care of your heart, it will take good care of you.

References

Pearson TA et al. American Heart Association Guide for Improving Cardiovascular Health at the Community Level. *Circulation*. 2003;107:645.
Leon AS et al. Cardiac Rehabilitation and Secondary Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease. *Circulation*. 2005; 111:369-376.
Excerpted and adapted from MyPyramid.gov. 2005 tips on vegetables, grains, meat and beans, and physical activity.

For more information, visit
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