



Heart Healthy

You heart pumps blood all throughout your body carrying important substances like oxygen and nutrients that are vital to your health and survival. Making even small changes to improve your cardiovascular health can have larger benefits than you may think.

The American Heart Association has designated February to be American Heart Month to increase awareness that heart disease is the nation's #1 killer. They encourage Americans to take ownership by making a few positive lifestyle changes.



1. Don't smoke.

Smokers have a higher risk of developing atherosclerosis. This can increase the risk of developing heart disease, having a heart attack, or having a stroke. Smoking also decreases tolerance for physical activity, decreases good cholesterol, and increases the tendency for blood to clot. However, your body begins to heal and reap health benefits as soon as you quit smoking!



2. Engage in regular physical activity.

Exercising for just...

30 minutes a day, 5 days a week

or

10 - 15 minutes, 7 days a week

...can help lower stress levels, boost mood, lower blood pressure, increase levels of good cholesterol, improve blood sugar levels, help you quit smoking, help with weight control, boost energy, improve sleep, and improve blood circulation. All of these benefits reduce the risk of developing heart problems such as atherosclerosis or hypertension!

Terms Defined

Atherosclerosis is a buildup of fatty substances in the arteries.

Hypertension is chronic high blood pressure.

Both of these conditions are common types of heart problems that can lead to more serious, life-threatening conditions such as heart attack, stroke, heart failure, and others. Following steps 1-3 can keep your heart healthy and strong to help prevent these cardiovascular conditions.



3. Eat a healthy diet.

Making positive changes in your diet is a powerful tool in making your heart strong and healthy. Improving your diet comes with myriad benefits including improved cholesterol levels, lowered blood pressure, controlled blood pressure, and maintenance of a healthy weight. Below are some heart healthy changes you can make in your diet.



Eat at least 4.5 cups of fresh fruits and vegetables a day.

Get at least 4 servings of nuts, legumes, and seeds each week.



Eat a 3, 1-ounce servings of fiber-rich whole grains 3 times each day.

Less than 7% of total calorie intake should be from saturated fat.



Eat at least 2, 3.5-ounce servings of fish a week.

Be sure to consume under 1,500 mg sodium a day.

Consume no more than 450 calories from sugar-sweetened beverages a week. This is approximately 2 medium sodas!