

Heart healthy tips

Here are 23 tips to help keep your heart healthy



Healthy food and drink choices

1. Do the DASH

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan is approved by the National Institutes of Health and was designed to help lower blood pressure and cholesterol. The plan is low in saturated fat and prioritizes fruits, vegetables, fish, grains, nuts, and low-fat dairy products.

2. Have a bowl of oatmeal

Oats are high in soluble fiber. The soluble fibers in oats have been shown to be effective in lowering LDL cholesterol when eaten regularly. Try having whole oat grains, steel cut oats, or rolled oats. Instant oats often come sweetened or flavored, so be sure to check the nutrition facts label for no added sugar.

3. Eat more fish

Eating at least two servings per week of fish high in omega-3 fatty acids appears to reduce the risk of heart disease and sudden cardiac death. Examples of fish high in omega-3 fatty acids include salmon, cod, mackerel, and herring.

4. Go for whole grain

Whole grains are linked to a lower risk of heart disease and are good sources of complex carbs, vitamins, and minerals. It is recommended that at least half of all the grains you eat should be whole grains.

5. Brew a pot of tea

Researchers in the Netherlands found that compared to drinking less than a cup a day, drinking three to six cups of tea a day (black, green, or similar leaf teas, not herbal) was associated with a 45 percent reduced risk of death from heart disease, and drinking more than six cups a day was associated with a 36 percent lower risk of heart disease itself. Other studies have shown that tea may help keep blood vessels relaxed and prevent blood clots.

Walgreens

6. Limit alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can cause spikes in blood pressure and higher triglyceride levels, increasing your risk for heart disease. If you decide to drink, limit yourself: one drink a day for women and one to two drinks each day for men.

7. Check your labels

Some packaged food products marketed as healthy choices are loaded with sugar or sodium (salt), so make sure to double-check the nutrition label. Watch out for foods that have too much sugar or salt. According to the American Heart Association, men should consume no more than 9 teaspoons of added sugar per day and women should consume no more than 6 teaspoons per day. They also recommend consuming no more than 2,300 mg of salt per day for most adults.

8. Keep a food diary

Individuals with excessive fat in their mid-section, as opposed to in other areas of their body, are at increased risk of heart disease. Starting a food diary may help you keep better track of your food choices to help you lose weight in the long term.

Prioritizing your health and wellbeing

9. Assess your risk for heart attack

One step you can take to lower your risk for heart disease is knowing which risk factors you have. Certain risk factors like age or a family history of heart disease cannot be changed, however, most other such as having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, being overweight, being inactive, or smoking cigarettes can be managed with your health care team.

10. Get the flu shot

A study published by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada found an association between receiving a seasonal flu vaccine and a lower chance of having a first heart attack. You get protection from the flu, too, of course!

11. Schedule regular checkups

Seeing your doctor regularly helps ensure that any irregularities with your blood pressure, blood sugar or cholesterol levels will be spotted and addressed as early as possible.

12. Practice good tooth brushing habits

Researchers found that people who brushed their teeth less than twice daily for under two minutes had three times the risk of having or dying from a heart attack, heart failure, or stroke than those who brushed at least twice daily for greater than two minutes.

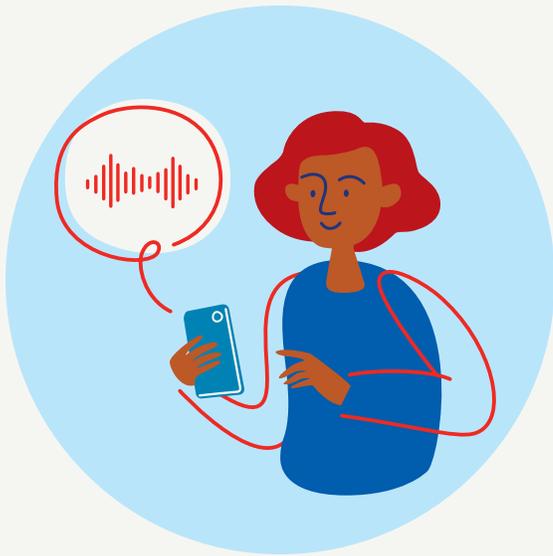
13. Quit smoking

Cigarette smoking is one of the most addressable risk factors for heart disease. According to the American Heart Association, almost one third of deaths from coronary heart disease are due to smoking and secondhand smoke. Smoking is the most preventable cause of death in the United States and thousands of people manage to quit every year.

14. Keep diabetes under control

If you have diabetes, your risk of heart attack is double that of someone who does not have diabetes. Keeping your blood sugar in check can help you manage your diabetes and lower your heart attack risk.





Physical activity and monitoring your progress

15. Biking or walking, instead of driving

Research has shown that people who use a form of active transportation like biking or walking had a lower chance of living with a risk factor for cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, etc.

16. Exercise with a friend

Being overweight and/or physically inactive puts you at greater risk for heart attack, so a good diet and proper exercise are key. Whether you join a recreational sports team, start a gym membership, or simply get together for a walk or jog after work, having someone to work out with can help you stay motivated.

17. Play with your kids or pets

Regular physical activity lowers your risk of heart disease. But you do not have to hit the gym or train for a marathon to get into better shape. Start simple, by spending some more time being active with the people — or pets — you love.

18. Track your target heart rate when you exercise

Your desired target heart rate zone should be the level at which your heart is being exercised and conditioned but not overworked.

The American Heart Association generally recommends a target heart rate of:

- **Moderate exercise intensity:** 50% to about 70% of your maximum heart rate
- **Vigorous exercise intensity:** 70% to about 85% of your maximum heart rate

The CDC states that you can estimate your maximum age-related heart rate by subtracting your age from the number 220. For example, a 50-year-old person would calculate $220 - 50 = 170$ beats per minute (bpm). This would be their estimated maximum age-related heart rate.

19. Weigh yourself regularly

Greater weight self-monitoring is correlated to greater weight loss and less weight gain, as the frequent feedback may prompt you to make changes in your routine to get the results you want.

20. Count your steps

Whether you use an old-fashioned pedometer, a fitness device, or your smartphone, get more active by keeping track of your step count and then trying to raise that number to about 10,000 steps (or 5 miles) a day. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator or parking farther away from the entrance to the grocery store are easy methods to raise your step count.



Managing stress

21. Meditate

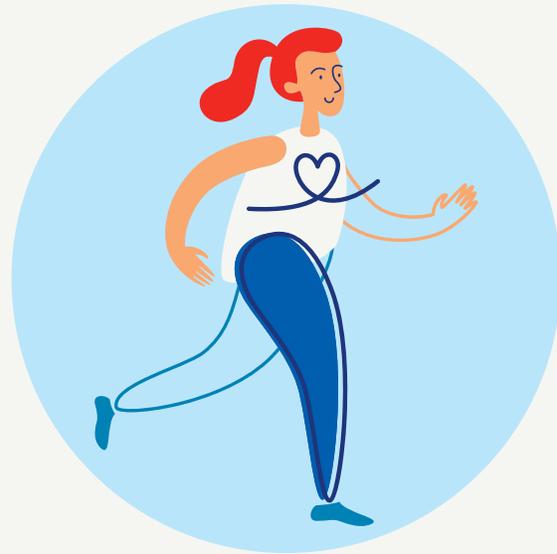
Meditation encourages our bodies to rest and relax, which helps to counteract the stress hormones caused by a difficult day or situation. Meditating daily has been shown to lower heart rate and blood pressure, which can lower your risk of heart disease.

22. Take a nature walk

Several studies on the Japanese concept of shinrin-yoku (rough translation: “take a walk in the woods” or “forest bathing”) showed that just being in forest environments results in lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, a slower pulse and lower blood pressure.

23. Learn when to say no

Learning to say no and to be realistic about one’s capabilities is more important than ever. Make sure to keep time in your schedule to relax and de-stress. Your heart will love you for it.



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