

February Is American Heart Month

Try These Heart Healthy Tips



February, American Heart month, is a good time to assess your “heart healthy” behavior as heart disease remains the number one killer for both men and women in this country. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) statistics, more than 910,000 Americans die of cardiovascular disease in the U.S. every year, approximately one death every 35 seconds. Experts in cardiovascular health say that until Americans change their thinking from “damage control” to one of “proactive prevention”, heart disease will remain the number one killer of both men and women.

The insidious onset of heart disease is often the very reason that persons may shrug off the need to take control of their heart health behaviors until they develop symptoms such as hypertension or high cholesterol. The good news is making positive changes in your lifestyle at any age can have a positive impact on preventing and possibly reversing your chances of developing heart disease. For instance, the CDC reports that lowering your blood cholesterol level by 10 percent may reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease by as much as 30 percent.

So if you think you have been “misbehaving” with your heart health behavior, try some of these easy strategies to help improve your performance.

Know Your Risk

First, take a moment to assess what your ten year risk of having a heart attack may be by logging on to the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute’s Ten Year Risk of a Heart Attack Calculator:

<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/atp/iii/calculator.asp?usertype=prof>

Then take the American Heart Association’s **Learn and Live Quiz** to find out what your risks for cardiovascular disease are and what you can do to improve them

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3019149>

Know Your Lipid Profile

The recommendation is that everyone over the age of 20 should have a complete lipid panel done at least every 5 years. Do you know what your numbers are? If not, start the year off right by scheduling a physical with your doctor. You can’t know your risk of cardiovascular disease without knowing these very important numbers. There are at least four lipid values that you need to know. Read the article from the Mayo clinic to get an explanation of what these numbers reveal:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cholesterol-levels/CL00001>

Blood Pressure Matters

Similarly, if you do not know what your typical blood pressure numbers are then it is time to get your blood pressure checked. Hypertension or high blood pressure is a serious risk factor for heart disease and needs to be medically controlled as it can cause undue pressure on the artery and heart walls. Since the symptoms of hypertension are “silent” you need to have regular blood pressure checks.

Find out just what those blood pressure numbers mean:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=2112>

Take a Look at Your Diet

A heart healthy diet is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and salt and high in fiber, fruits, vegetables and grains. Making simple and gradual changes in your diet such as using fat free dairy products and adding fruit and vegetable servings can improve your heart health. Find some heart healthy recipes at these sites:

- **Mayo Clinic Healthy Recipe Center**
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/healthy-recipes/RE99999>
- **American Heart Association Delicious Decisions**
<http://www.americanheart.org/deliciousdecisions/jsp/catalog/browseCategories.jsp>

Quit Smoking

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), smokers have more than twice the risk of having a heart attack as non smokers. Smoking is also the biggest risk factor for sudden cardiac death. The good news is the AHA also reports smokers that quit smoking return to a non smoker risk of heart disease in just 2 to 3 years. So if you smoke, get a buddy or two and get a plan for a quit date. Then log onto one these sites for support or ask your doctor about ways you can quit:



- **Smokefree.gov:** <http://www.smokefree.gov/>
- **Lung Association:** <http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK900E&b=22931>

Move It or Lose It!

Exercise improves heart function, lowers blood pressure, stress and cholesterol, boosts energy and helps to control weight - all factors that promote heart health. The general recommendation is to get at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise (test: you can talk easily but not sing while doing it) on at least five but preferable most days of the week. The 30 minutes does not have to be done all at once, breaking it up in to 10 or 15 minute intervals are okay.

Making exercise a fun activity such as dancing, walking the dog or playing a sport is just as healthy for your heart as a trip to the gym. Adding fitness minutes to your day like taking the stair, parking in the farthest space and generally moving as much as possible throughout the day will help increase your heart health as well. Try some of these sites to “fit in fitness”:

Fit in aerobic fitness minutes right at your desk:

<http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/exercise-at-your-desk>

Cardio anywhere, anytime:

http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/fitness_articles.asp?id=1038

Keep an Eye on Your Weight

The statistics from the National Health Education and Nutrition survey state that nearly one third of adults in the United States are obese. A simple formula for managing a healthy body weight really comes down to calories in and energy out. It is important that you find out how many calories you should consume in a day if you want to lose weight. Simply multiply your current body weight by 15 and you will get the number of calories needed to maintain your current weight. So eating less than that amount per day combined with exercise will give you a negative calorie balance and you will begin to lose weight.

Maintaining good portion control can also be a helpful strategy in helping to control weight. Over the decades, our sense of what a single portion is has become distorted. Take the Portion Distortion quiz with your family--<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/>--then download the portion size card to carry in your wallet: <http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/servingcard7.pdf>

Try these free sites that will allow you to track your daily calories and activity.

- **Spark People (pull down the tools menu) - www.sparkpeople.com**
- **American Heart Association - <http://mystartonline.org/>**

By choosing to make small, consistent changes in your everyday lifestyle, you can beat those statistics and be well on the way to having an A+ in your “heart healthy” behavior. Now that you know how to make the grade, share the information with your family and friends.

More Heart Health Resources

- The Cleveland Clinic heart info
<http://my.clevelandclinic.org/heart/heartworks/heartlooklike.aspx>
- Cholesterol Quiz - <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1516>
- Calculate Your Daily Fat Intake - <http://www.myfatstranlator.com/>
- Calculate Your Body Mass Index (BMI)
<http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm>

This information is brought to you by HRwellness@fcps.edu.

For more information and resources on wellness topics log on to the FCPS HR Wellness web site at <http://www.fcps.edu/DHR/employees/benefits/wellness/index.htm>