

## FEBRUARY HEART MONTH AWARENESS



Many things come in groups of seven. There are seven days of the week, seven colors in the rainbow and seven swans a-swimming. In addition, seven is considered by many to be a lucky number. There are also seven ways you can live heart healthy and enjoy at least seven decades – plus seven.

1. **Don't smoke.**

Smoking or using smokeless tobacco products are significant risk factors for developing heart disease. Many of the more than 4,800 chemicals in tobacco smoke can damage the heart and blood vessels, causing them to constrict and ultimately lead to a heart attack. Cigarette smoke contains nicotine that can narrow blood vessels and carbon monoxide that replaces oxygen in the blood. Both can increase blood pressure and put added strain on the heart.

2. **Eat healthy.**

Take extra helpings of fruits, vegetables and whole grains while passing on the deep-fried fast foods, bakery products and packaged snack items. Limit saturated fat – which can raise cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease – that is found in beef, butter, cheese and milk. Instead, opt for foods such as fish that have polyunsaturated fat, which can decrease the risk of heart attack and lower blood pressure.

3. **Exercise regularly.**

You can reduce your chances of developing fatal heart disease by participating in moderately vigorous physical activity. Aim for at least 30 to 60 minutes of activity most days of the week. You don't have to go all out to achieve benefits, but you will reap greater rewards by increasing the intensity, duration and frequency of your workouts.

4. **Don't drink (too much).**

Too much alcohol can increase blood pressure and lead to heart failure or stroke. However, light to moderate drinking – which is considered to be one drink per day for women and two or less for men – can help prevent heart attacks.

5. **Watch your weight.**

Being overweight or obese increases your risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure and insulin resistance, all of which can raise the chances of developing cardiovascular disease. Talk with your doctor about a healthy weight loss plan that includes good nutrition and exercise, not fad diets or supplements.

6. **Get regular health screenings.**

Adults should have their blood pressure checked at least every two years and cholesterol about every five years. High blood pressure and elevated cholesterol do not cause symptoms, but they can damage your heart and blood vessels.

7. **Reduce stress.**

Being under stress may cause you to overeat, start smoking, or smoke more than you would normally – none of which is good for your heart. Research has shown that stress in young adults predicts blood pressure risk in middle-age.

You can reduce the risk of developing heart disease by more than 80 percent by living heart healthy. And it's never too late to adopt sensible health habits. Whether you are 17 or 77, eating right, exercising, not smoking and maintaining a healthy weight will help protect your heart. For more information about living heart healthy, talk with your doctor.