

FEBRUARY IS AMERICAN HEART MONTH: 10 TIPS FOR A HEALTHY HEART



With Valentine's Day just around the corner, many view February as the month of love, but it is also **American Heart Month**. Heart disease is the leading killer of Americans, taking the lives of 2,200 people each day. In addition, about 103 million adults have high blood pressure and 6.5 million are living with heart failure. While genetic factors do play a part in **cardiovascular disease**, the good news is 80 percent of cardiovascular diseases may be preventable with education and action. Simple lifestyle changes can make a big impact when it comes to heart health. Show your heart some love with these 10 tips.

1. Stop smoking



Quitting smoking is the best thing that can be done for the heart and for overall health. Smoking is the most preventable cause of premature death in the United States, and smokers have a higher risk of developing many chronic disorders, including atherosclerosis, or the buildup of fatty substances in the arteries. When combined with other heart disease risk factors, smoking increases the risks associated with those factors. Quitting is never easy, but there are lots of helpful **resources** for those looking to start.

2. Know your numbers



Maintaining your healthy weight, blood pressure and **total cholesterol**, all play a significant role in maintaining a healthy heart. While there are standard guidelines for **blood pressure** and cholesterol, ideal weight goals are individual to each person.

A physician can help determine an appropriate goal weight based on additional factors such as age and height.

3. Screen for diabetes



Untreated **diabetes** can lead to heart disease, there are also many other complications. Diabetes can be easily detected through a simple blood test and managed a variety of ways under the care of a physician.

4. Get active



Heart pumping physical activity not only helps to prevent cardiovascular disease but can also improve overall mental and physical health. The American Heart Association recommends five 30 minute moderate exercise sessions each week.

While this may seem daunting, it is important to note that these sessions can be broken up into two or three 10 or 15-minute segments throughout the day. Walking, jogging, biking and swimming are all great forms of exercise. It is important to remember that something is always better than nothing. Opting to take the stairs and parking farther back in the parking lot are great ways to squeeze in activity when the time is short.

5. Build small muscle



Strength training helps cardiovascular exercise by toning muscles and burning fat. In addition, proper strength training can improve daily functional movements, decreasing the chance of injury. The American Heart Association recommends

getting in two days of moderate to high-intensity strength training each week.

6. Eat smart



A healthy diet full of heart-smart foods is essential to a healthy heart and lifestyle. Salmon, nuts, berries, and oats are just a few of the heart “super foods” that may help reduce the risk of atherosclerosis. Dark chocolate is

also on the list and is a great way to satisfy a sweet tooth (in moderation).

7. Limit junk



To reap the full benefits of a heart healthy diet, it's important to limit the intake of nutrient-poor junk foods. Added sugars, saturated fat and excessive sodium can all negatively impact heart health, it can also impact overall physical health. These foods, when eaten in excess, can cause weight gain, raise blood pressure and clog arteries, which are all risk factors for heart disease.

8. Stress less



Stress increases cortisol, which leads to weight gain, a key risk factor for heart disease. In addition, stress can lead to other unhealthy habits, making it harder to stick to a heart-healthy program. Stress can also decrease overall happiness and increase the risk for anxiety and depression. Many of the items on this list can also help with **reducing stress**, in addition to practicing positive self-talk and incorporating mindfulness meditation breaks throughout the day.

9. Sleep more



Sleeping will restore the body, help decrease stress and increase overall happiness. To reap the full benefits, clocking seven hours each night is key. A calming bedtime routine and going to bed and waking at the same time each day are all great ways to establish **healthy sleep patterns**. Getting ample sunshine and physical activity throughout the day also aid in improving sleep quality.

10. Smile



A happy heart is a healthy heart. Making time for several enjoyable activities and hobbies helps relieve stress and will improve the overall mood and provide a great foundation for a heart-healthy lifestyle.

