

Making Your Lifestyle Heart Healthy February is American Heart Month



The millions of Americans diagnosed with heart and cardiovascular diseases can benefit from making healthful choices in their day to day lives.

"While it's certainly necessary to take medications to lower high cholesterol or blood pressure, it's equally important to have a healthy lifestyle," says Richard Stein, M.D., chief of the department of medicine in the Singer Division at Beth Israel Hospital in New York City, and a spokesman for the American Heart Association. "People who are informed and proactive when it comes to lowering their health risks are very likely to avoid heart disease and heart attacks."

By following these recommendations, people at normal risk for heart disease can reduce their risk and make their lives more enjoyable.

Eat a Healthful Diet

Eating a healthy diet has been proven to reduce the risk for heart disease.

To eat a heart-healthy diet:

- Eat 2 cups fresh fruits and 2.5 cups vegetables every day.
- Limit saturated and trans fats by using olive oil or other vegetable oils instead of butter or margarine.
- Eat more chicken and fish and less red meat.
- Eat 6 ounces of grains, of which at least 3 ounces should be from whole-grain bread and cereal.
- Limit or eliminate fast foods, which are often loaded with salt, sugar, and fats.
- If you drink alcohol, do so moderately -- no more than two drinks a day if you're a man, one if you're a woman.
- Limit your salt/sodium to 2300mg.
- Get the equivalent of 3 cups of fat free or low-fat milk or dairy products.

Exercise More

Regular exercise keeps your heart and the rest of your body in shape.

To add more activity to your life:

- Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program if you've been sedentary and/or have a chronic disease.
- Start slowly and increase your activity gradually to a total of 30 to 60 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week.
- Do weight training and stretching exercises several times a week.

Stop Smoking

Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease.

To live smoke free:

- Decide to quit and set a quit date. Try again if you fail. Successful quitters have "quit" an

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- average of nine times.
- Ask your doctor for information about cessation aids, such as a patch, inhaler, and counseling/support program.

Learn to Relax

Chronic anger and stress can damage your heart.

To better cope with life's pressures:

- Try to be positive instead of negative in your outlook on life.
- Take 15 to 20 minutes a day to sit quietly and breathe deeply.
- Take time for yourself each day. Read a book, listen to music, or enjoy a hobby.

Monitor Your Health

Be proactive when it comes to your heart's health. To do so, work with your health care provider to reduce your heart disease risk by following up with him or her for treatment for high blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

"Denial is the number one risk factor for having a heart attack," says Dr. Stein. "Call 911 immediately if you have chest pain if you're a man, or are short of breath, dizzy and have a burning sensation in the chest area if you're a woman. If you can get to a hospital in the same hour these symptoms start, it's possible to prevent a heart attack or limit the damage."

For more heart disease information visit:

<http://americanbehavioral.personaladvantage.com/content?sub=10000156>
<http://www.americanheart.org/>

Heart Healthy Recipe: Scallop Kabobs

These colorful kabobs use scallops, which are naturally low in saturated fat.

Ingredients:

- 3 medium green peppers, cut into 1 inch squares
- 1 1/2 lb fresh bay scallops
- 1 pt cherry tomatoes
- 1/4C white cooking wine
- 1/4 C vegetable oil
- 3 Tbsp lemon juice
- Dash garlic powder
- Black pepper (to taste)
- 4 skewers

Method:

1. Parboil green peppers for 2 minutes.
2. Alternately thread first three ingredients on skewers.
3. Combine next five ingredients.
4. Brush kabobs with wine/oil/lemon mixture, then place on grill (or under broiler).
5. Grill for 15 minutes, turning and basting frequently.

Control Breathing, Control Stress

You're stuck in rush-hour traffic, glancing at your car's clock every few minutes as you strain to get to work on time. You may not notice, but your breathing is shallow, your pulse rate is high, and your chest feels tight. In fact, you feel this way in many stressful situations.

Sound familiar? Modern society creates more than its share of stress. It's difficult to change some situations -- but you can manage how you feel about them, experts say.

Begin with something you take for granted -- your breathing. If you're on that busy highway, pay attention to what's going on around you, but pay

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attention to your breathing, too. It's one of the few things you can control.

"Focusing on your breathing is one of the highly effective ways of reducing stress," says cardiologist James Rippe, M.D., author of 10 books on health and fitness, including *Healthy Heart for Dummies*, "It brings you into the here and now, distracting you from your worries."

"We've become addicted to moving and thinking at hyper-speed," adds Stephan Rechtschaffen, M.D., wellness expert and author of the book *Timeshifting*. "When we're under stress, our breathing is short, high up in the lungs. More relaxed breathing doesn't rely on the chest wall, but rather on the abdomen."

Abdominal breathing, experts say, provides the lungs with more oxygen and is more rhythmic. It's something that opera singers and other performers have known for years: Abdominal breathing allows them to control their breath, to sing or speak with greater power, and to help them focus on the moment.

Breathing is just the beginning. If you can adjust your breath, you can adjust other things in your life, experts say. Slow your breath down when you walk into your office or home and you'll notice that you won't jump at the first problem that hits you. When your breath is quiet, you are quiet.

Practice Your Breathing

Believe it or not, most of us could use a breathing lesson. Practice at home a few times when you're not under stress. Then, try putting these techniques into practice when a stressful situation occurs.

In a relaxed setting, take three really deep breaths, focusing on your exhalations. "Really let it out," says Dr. Rechtschaffen. "It may feel unnatural at first, but stick with it."

Now, begin focusing on where your breath is coming from, experts say. Here's one practice method:

- Sit on the edge of a chair, feet flat on the floor.
- Place one hand on your lower back and the other hand on your abdomen, with three fingers

below your navel.

- As you breathe in, your abdomen should rise, like a balloon inflating.
- As you breathe out, your abdomen should fall, with the sensation that the balloon is losing its air.



Concentrate on your abdomen, not your chest. Practice from a few minutes to 20 minutes each day. Soon, it will come naturally.

For more stress management information visit: <http://americanbehavioral.personaladvantage.com/content?sub=10001675>

Use a Budget to Avoid Financial Stress

A good way to avoid financial stress is to create and follow a budget. Using a budget requires you to fine-tune financial planning skills that can help lead you toward financial security.

Building a Budget

As you put together your budget, start with exploring your short-term and long-term financial plans. What is important to you and your family? What is most important to put money away for, in both the near future, and the not-so-near future?

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Next, start to write down a reasonable budget for you and your family. First of all, account for necessities like food, car payments, rent/mortgage, and other vital things. Remember that your budget can allow for fun money, too. You can put away a certain amount each month to spend on exciting (and memory-creating) events like family vacations. As you account for fun money, also realize that you should put away a certain amount each month for savings, emergencies, and investments.

If applicable, another good thing to consider when planning a budget is how you'll work your way out

resist the temptation of budgeting in things that won't greatly benefit you or your family.

Consider Outside Help

You may want to meet with a financial planner to perfect your budget. Though a financial planner will cost a little money, the assistance may end up saving you money in the long run.

For more information:

<http://americanbehavioral.personaladvantage.com/content?sub=10003153>



of debt. Paying back credit card debt and other forms of debt will help lower your overall financial stress level. The more you climb out of debt the more relief you will feel, so make credit card payments and other essential payments part of your monthly budget.

Lastly, take some time to consider what purchases are most important to you. Do you really need the things you think you do? Should you really budget for the latest shoes or new electronic toy? By focusing your attention on what's most important, you can save money and spend money towards the most important things, like spending time with family and making special memories. Having an overabundance of material things will not contribute to your overall happiness, so try to