

Q. What can I do to keep my heart healthy?

A. Your heart is always working. It beats 60 to 100 times a minute. It pumps an average of 2,000 gallons of blood every day. It's a muscle that keeps you alive. That's why heart healthy habits are so important.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the world.¹ But it's largely preventable.

"The lowest-tech approach – diet and lifestyle – can undeniably reverse heart disease," says Dr. Michael Greger. He's the author of the book: *How Not to Die: Discover the Foods Scientifically Proven to Prevent and Reverse Disease*.²

Here are eight ways to keep your heart healthy:

- 1. Eat more plants** like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. These foods are packed with vitamins and nutrients. They're low in calories. Eating this way can keep your heart healthy, and even reverse heart disease.³
- 2. Be more active.** Aim for at least 30 minutes a day. Run if you want. But you can also walk, swim, or cycle. If you're extra busy, break it up into 10-minute chunks of exercise. Even a little exercise burns calories, and helps control weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure.
- 3. Maintain a healthy weight,** or lose weight if you need to. About 71 percent of all adults in the U.S. are overweight or obese.⁴ Being overweight makes it harder for your heart to pump blood. It also raises your risk for other health problems linked to heart disease.
- 4. Don't smoke,** or quit if you do. Smoking damages arteries in the heart. This can reduce blood flow,



raise cholesterol, and up the risk for a heart attack or stroke. Quit and stay smoke-free for a year, and you'll cut your risk for heart disease in half.⁵

- 5. Avoid or limit alcohol.** If you drink, limit alcohol to no more than two drinks per day for men. One drink per day for women, zero if pregnant. Or just avoid alcohol. Why? Alcohol can increase blood pressure and triglyceride levels. It can even disrupt your heartbeat.
- 6. Manage stress in healthy ways.** Stress can lead to choices that harm heart health. Maybe you overeat, start smoking, or drink too much when you're stressed out. Find other ways to deal with stress like exercise, meditation, yoga, volunteer work, or enjoying a hobby.
- 7. Develop healthy relationships.** You can't measure this like weight or blood pressure. But it makes a difference. A recent study found that social isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29 percent.⁶

ASK THE Wellness DOCTOR

Close social bonds and a sense of community can help you live longer.

"People who are lonely and depressed are three to 10 times more likely to get sick and die prematurely," says Dr. Dean Ornish. "Those who have a strong sense of love and community live longer. I don't know any other single factor that affects our health... to such as strong degree."⁷

- 8. Get a check-up.** At least once a year, schedule a check-up with your doctor. Check your blood pressure. Get a basic blood test. These exams can measure risk factors for heart health.

Want to keep your heart healthy? Make an effort to do these eight lifestyle choices.

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