

February 2015

## Be Smart With Your Heart

### How to Lower Your Risk of Heart Disease

Heart disease has been the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States for over eighty years. While this is quite alarming, you can lower your risk through your daily habits. There are a number of factors within your control that can affect your risk of heart disease.

These risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and pre-diabetes, smoking, overweight and obesity, physical inactivity, and an unhealthy diet.

The two main things that you can do to decrease your risk of heart disease are to increase your physical activity and to eat a healthy diet.

All American adults need at least 150 minutes of physical activity per week (or 30 minutes per day, 5 days a week). Most people who work or who are busy parents say they don't have enough time to exercise. Well, good news! These 30 minutes of activity can be broken up throughout the day! For example, if you need a break from sitting at your desk at work, you can walk up and down the stairs or take a brisk walk for 10 minutes.

If you do this 3 times a day, you will have met your physical activity goal for the day! More physical chores around the house also count like vacuuming, planting a garden, sweeping and trimming bushes.



The other factor that contributes to heart disease is your diet. The first step to making your eating habits more healthy is to increase your fruit, vegetable, and whole grain intake, while decreasing your intake of saturated fats and added sugars.

Foods that contain saturated fats are fried foods, fatty meats, butter, and high fat dairy products. Replace these foods with lean meat and skinless poultry, low-fat or fat free dairy products, fish, and nuts.

Also lower your intake of added sugars. Foods that contain added sugars are soda, candy, cakes, cookies, fruit drinks, and even your latte from the local coffee shop. Reducing both the amount of saturated fat and added sugar in your diet will protect your overall health.

Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are high in vitamins and minerals that seem to keep the heart and blood vessels working well. They are also high in fiber, which increases satiety, making you feel full

## Lower Your Risk cont.

longer. Pack a piece of fruit or a snack instead of some cookies. The fruit will be more satisfying while still providing the sweet taste you crave.

Also lower your sodium intake. High amounts of sodium contribute to high blood pressure, which can lead heart disease and stroke.

The Dietary Guidelines recommend no more than 2300 milligrams of sodium per day. Most Americans consume nearly double this amount.

The majority of our sodium intake comes from processed foods like canned goods and convenience foods. When choosing these foods, look for low sodium versions.

High sodium foods are also found in both sit-down and fast food restaurants. Try to limit the amount of meals you consume on the go. Instead prepare your meals for the week on your day off. Then freeze the meals and reheat them when you need them. You and your family will enjoy healthy meals without interrupting your busy schedules.

Smoking also damages your heart and is one of the major causes of coronary artery disease. If you are a current smoker, talk to your health professional about how to quit today!

In summary, to lower your risk of heart disease, watch your weight, quit smoking, lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels, eat a well-balanced diet, and increase your physical activity level. Ask your health

professional for more information about protecting your heart.

## Heart-Shaped Candy: Not So Heart-Healthy

During this Valentine's Day season, try to avoid the sweets that often come with



the holiday. Instead prepare a heart-healthy meal for your sweetheart. The American Heart Association offers recipe ideas at [http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/Recipes/Heart-Healthy-Recipes\\_UCM\\_465114\\_RecipeLanding.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/Recipes/Heart-Healthy-Recipes_UCM_465114_RecipeLanding.jsp)

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Contributor - Danielle D'Auria, University of Georgia Dietetics Student

Editor - Connie Crawley, MS, RD, LD, Extension Nutrition Specialist

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