

Improve heart health; prevent heart attack - Tips

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Today we hear of even young people suffering from heart problems. Sedentary lifestyles and lack of physical exercise, wrong food habits and stress could be some of the contributing factors.

Look after your heart; your heart will look after you

Some lifestyle changes and healthy living habits are required to maintain a healthy & strong heart.

Tip 1: Stop smoking

Smoking causes thickening and narrowing of blood vessels with the build-up of plaque, making the heart work harder. Smoking also makes blood sticky and more likely to clot, which can block blood flow to the heart and brain.

Quit smoking to help reverse any damage to the heart.

Join a support group; Practice relaxation techniques; Chew on a fruit to kill the craving

Tip 2: Control blood pressure

Unhealthy lifestyles; food habits, stress and lack of physical activity are some of the causes of hypertension which causes the arteries that supply blood and oxygen to the brain to burst or be blocked, leading to a stroke.

This “silent killer” usually has no warning signs or symptoms, so have a regular check-up to keep it under control.

Avoid stress triggers; Reduce sodium in your diet; Relax and enjoy your activities

Tip 3: Manage Diabetes

Eating foods high in refined carbohydrates and sugar increases blood sugar and insulin levels, which may lead to diabetes over time. Smoking can also cause insulin resistance.

Include fiber at each meal to prevent spikes in blood sugar and insulin levels and help control diabetes.

Drink enough water; Cut sugar from your diet; Avoid refined carbohydrates

Tip 4: Reduce stress

When one cannot cope with a particular situation, it puts undue pressures on the physical and mental state of the person causing stress. The body readies itself to fight back by producing larger quantities of the chemicals cortisol, epinephrine and norepinephrine. This makes the person more alert, increases blood pressure and pulse rate but reduces immune system and slows down the digestive process.

Include some relaxation techniques like meditation, aromatherapy or reflexology in your daily schedule.

Take a break; Listen to music; Make time for hobbies

Tip 5: Control cholesterol

LDL or ‘Bad cholesterol’ transports cholesterol particles in your body and builds up in the walls of your arteries, which form clots making it difficult for blood to flow through your arteries.

Work to increase HDL or ‘Good cholesterol’, with a healthy diet, regular exercise and medication which picks up excess cholesterol and takes it back to your liver to metabolise.

Increase soluble fibre; Reduce saturated fats; Consume more of plant protein

Tip 6: Limit alcohol

It could be depression, anxiety or just the company that prompts a person to consume alcohol. Some take it as a form of self-medication or to unwind after work but on the other hand alcohol causes mental imbalance where a person loses control over his actions and emotions.

Limit alcohol to protect the most important organ in your body, your liver which filters your blood, detoxifies chemicals and metabolises drugs.

Don't keep alcohol at home; Dine early to avoid temptation; Switch to a non-alcoholic beverage

Tip 7: Have a healthy diet

Eating foods with excess sodium, sugar, processed foods and meats high in saturated fats makes your heart work harder than normal, increasing your blood pressure as you need more blood going to your digestive system.

Think about food as medicine and eat foods rich in potassium, fiber, protein and lower in salt and saturated fat to improve your heart health.

Include whole grains; Reduce unhealthy fats; Eat more vegetables and fruit

Tip 8: Be active

Regular activity increases the smaller blood vessels i.e. the collateral blood vessels that connect different coronary arteries. These serve as an alternate route to supply blood to the heart muscle that may be blocked and help prevent an attack.

Do any activity that raises your heart rate such as walking, cycling, swimming or dancing.

Do any activity that you enjoy; Make friends that have a common goal; Join a group that organises fun activities

Tip 9: Exercise regularly

When it's exercised, the heart can pump more blood through the body and continue working at optimal efficiency with little strain. Regular exercise also helps to keep arteries and other blood vessels flexible, ensuring good blood flow and normal blood pressure.

Aim for cardio exercise at least 30 to 60 minutes of activity daily which will give you mental well-being and stress relief with increased bone strength, and better metabolism when combined with weight-bearing exercises.

Play an outdoor sport that you like; Join a group class to increase adherence; Do at least 30 minutes of cardio activity daily

Tip 10: Manage weight

Obese people require more blood to supply oxygen and nutrients to their bodies and in turn will require more pressure to move this blood around. This causes harmful changes in the heart's structure and function that can eventually lead to heart failure.

Include monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats in fish, nuts, olive & flaxseed oils to improve the health of your heart and blood vessels

Keep a check on your weight; Add strength training to increase metabolism; Keep a food diary and activity chart and monitor it regularly.