

Compliments of your
healthcare professional:

Considering... Diet and Lifestyle

Seven Heart-Healthy Goals from the American Heart Association

FALL 2006

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH

Maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle is your best defense against heart disease—it's just a matter of making the right choices, which is easier than you may think! Follow these seven simple steps from the American Heart Association to improve your diet and lifestyle and, most importantly, put you well on the path to a healthy heart! Remember: always check with your doctor before making any changes to your diet or exercise habits.

1. Eat Healthier

- ❖ Include a variety of fruits (4 medium-sized fruits, such as apples and peaches), vegetables (4–5 cups), and grains (7 servings) in your diet each day
- ❖ Eat 2 servings of fish each week (about 8 ounces; roughly the size of two decks of cards); it's a healthy alternative to meats that are high in saturated fat (such as beef), and it can reduce your risk for heart disease
- ❖ Choose fat-free or low-fat dairy products, such as skim milk instead of whole or frozen yogurt instead of ice cream
- ❖ Substitute chicken (skin removed) or other lean meats like pork for fatty meats like beef
- ❖ Drink alcohol in moderation (1 drink or less for women and 2 or less for men per day)

2. Watch Your Weight

- ❖ Don't "supersize" it! Studies have shown that bigger food portions (restaurants often dish these up) can lead to weight gain
- ❖ Limit your intake of beverages and foods with added sugars, which can also lead to weight gain; replace soda with water or low-calorie drinks and cookies with plain (no salt or butter added) popcorn
- ❖ Cut back on eating out, especially fast food, which is high in *saturated* and *trans* fats, cholesterol, and added sugars and salt

3. Keep Your Cholesterol in Check

- ❖ Make regular appointments with your doctor to check your cholesterol levels
- ❖ Your "bad" cholesterol (LDL-C) should ideally be *less than 100 mg/dL*—as a rule, aim for a healthy range of *100–129 mg/dL*; your "good" cholesterol (HDL-C) should be *more than 50 mg/dL* if you're a woman and *more than 40 mg/dL* if you're a man
- ❖ The higher your "bad" cholesterol, the higher your risk for developing heart disease; remember: keep your LDL-C *Lower* and your HDL-C *Higher*

4. Control Your Blood Pressure (BP)

- ❖ Regularly check your BP during visits with your doctor or at a BP station found in most drug stores or supermarkets
- ❖ Aim for a BP of *less than 120/80 mm Hg*
- ❖ Cut back on salt in your diet
- ❖ *Consider this:* studies have shown that weight loss also keeps BP under control

5. Aim for a Low Blood Sugar Level

- ❖ Your *blood sugar* level is a measure of the amount of sugars in your blood and is checked by your doctor during regular visits
- ❖ Try to keep your level (before meals) between *80–120 mg/dL*
- ❖ A good tip: avoid foods and beverages that have added sugars, such as certain cereals and fruit juices

6. Get Moving!

- ❖ Exercise for at least 30 minutes each day
- ❖ Some ways to fit exercise into your busy day: take the stairs instead of the elevator or the escalator; park your car a little farther away at work or when shopping; and take a walk during your lunch break—every little bit helps!
- ❖ *Consider this:* exercise not only lowers your risk for heart disease but also for type 2 diabetes, obesity, and even depression!

7. Stop Smoking (And If You Don't Smoke, Don't Start!)

- ❖ Try an over-the-counter nicotine product (gum, lozenge, or patch) or ask your physician about prescription medications that can help you to quit
- ❖ *Consider this:* quitting can lower your heart attack risk by one-third within 2 years!

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