



Heart
Health

How to Prevent Heart Disease

More than 700,000 Americans experience their first-ever heart attack each year, according to the Heart Foundation.

Some 335,000 have another one. Nationally, heart disease remains a leading cause of death for both men and women: For every seven fatalities, one is the result of heart disease. The good news: Lifestyle modifications can substantially lower your risks.

DON'T SMOKE

The harmful substances in tobacco affect the heart and blood vessels while reducing the oxygen levels in your bloodstream. Additionally, smoking is linked to elevated blood pressure and increased strain on the heart. That's why experts recommend smoking cessation – and if you don't smoke, don't start. Steer clear of secondhand smoke, since it can also increase your risk of disease. The encouraging news for those who quit and anyone else contemplating a change is that the risk of heart disease starts to decline just days after quitting. Within a year, the risk is reduced by about half compared to a smoker.

BECOME ACTIVE

Incorporating physical activity into a predominantly sedentary lifestyle can significantly lower the chances of developing heart disease,



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reduce blood pressure, and decrease the risk of certain types of diabetes. And you don't need to become a fitness fanatic or a bodybuilder to mitigate these health risks. Integrate these simple activities into your routine to enhance heart health: Take part in 150 minutes of moderate exercise

each week, such as brisk walking. Add 75 minutes of vigorous exercise weekly, like running. Include at least two sessions of strength training per week. By implementing these adjustments, you can enjoy substantial improvements in your heart health and overall well-being.

IMPROVED DIET

Those who are overweight or obese face a higher risk of heart attacks and related conditions. Safeguard your heart by modifying eating habits to reduce intake of salt, sugar and processed foods, while increasing the consumption of lean proteins, nutrient-rich

vegetables, fruits and whole grains. A nutritious diet provides essential vitamins that enhance your body's efficiency while helping maintain a healthy weight. If you're not sure which foods can positively affect your health, look to your doctor or a local nutritionist for guidance.

Lose Weight the Right Way

One of the best ways to reduce your risk of heart-related issues is losing excess weight.

Carrying additional pounds places extra strain on the heart and can lead to serious health conditions such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. Even a modest amount of weight loss can yield substantial health benefits, including reductions in blood pressure, cholesterol levels and blood sugar, all of which can decrease the likelihood of developing chronic diseases. Just keep in mind that healthy weight loss is always a gradual process. Try not to feel disheartened by your progress, if it feels slow. Here are a few key strategies for effectively losing weight – and maintaining your healthier lifestyle:

CONSULT WITH YOUR PHYSICIAN

What defines healthy weight varies from person to person, so an effective weight loss plan will vary, too. Discuss your goals with your doctor or nutritionist. They'll provide a better understanding of a healthy individual weight range based on your height, body composition and activity level. They can also develop the most effective methods for achieving and maintaining your weight loss.

IMPROVING YOUR DIET

Reducing your caloric intake is an important pathway to weight loss, but approach this

gradually. If your daily intake is 2,500 calories, for instance, avoid an abrupt reduction to 1,500 calories. Instead, aim to decrease your intake progressively as you shed pounds. To optimize your daily caloric intake, focus on incorporating a variety of whole grain, vegetables, fruits, low-fat or fat-free

dairy products, and lean proteins such as beans, fish, nuts and eggs into your diet. Limit foods that are high in sodium, saturated fats and added sugars – but remember that eliminating them isn't necessary. Include healthier alternatives in your favorite recipes, when possible.

GET ACTIVE

Make exercising a part of your new regimen. Just remember that increased physical activity without tandem dietary improvements won't necessarily result in your desired weight loss. Instead, combine exercise with a balanced diet. You'll be on a path

to losing weight even with a more moderate caloric reduction. To maintain a healthy weight, experts suggest 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise each week. That includes brisk walking, fitness classes or cycling. But even low-impact activities like yoga are very beneficial.

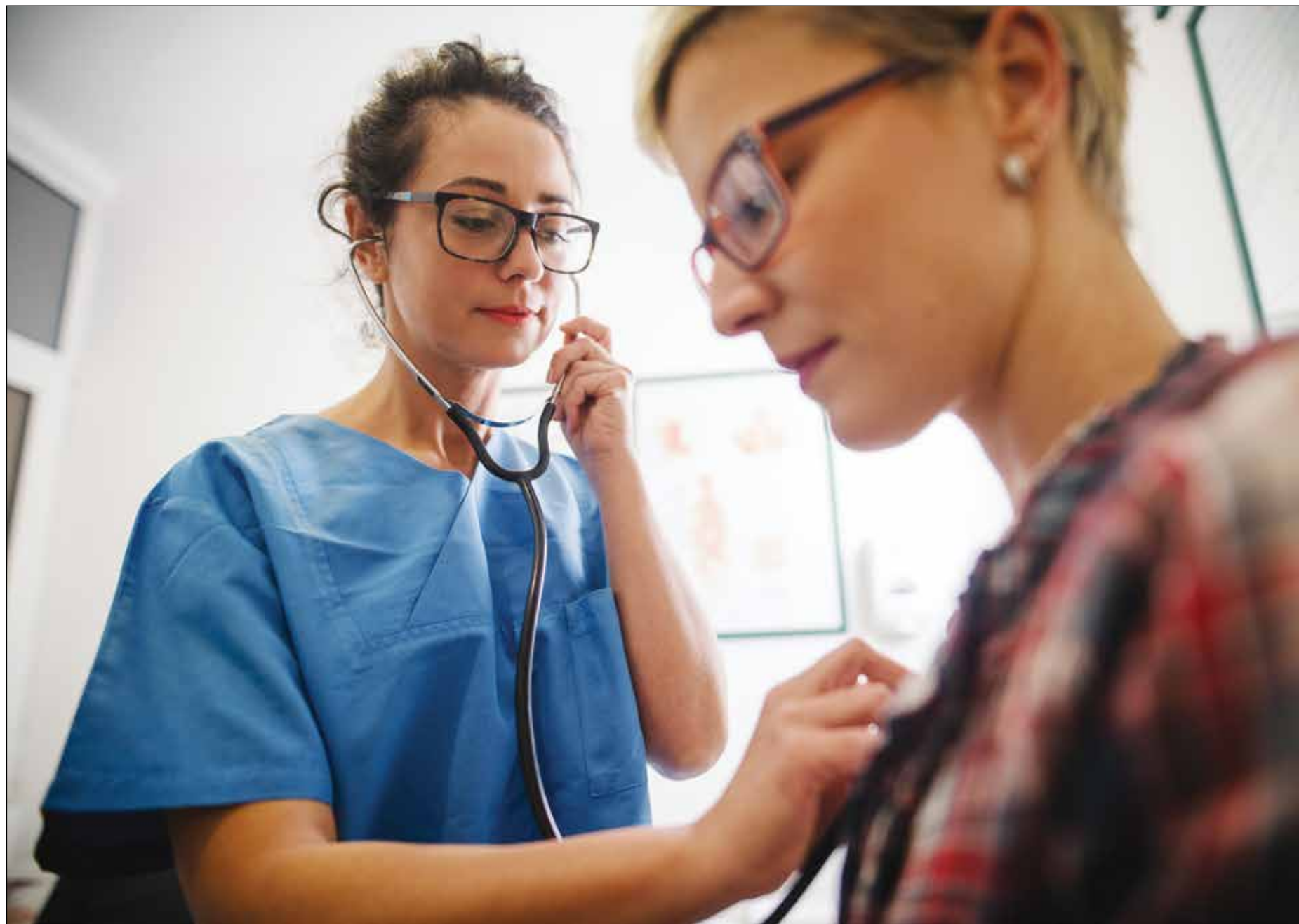


Heart Disease and Gender

Both men and women face the risk of heart disease and its associated complications — and the recommendations for a more heart-healthy lifestyle are the same in many ways.

Everyone should participate in regular physical activity, avoid smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke, and eat healthier, more nutritious food. Common factors can lead to an earlier onset of the disease for both men and women. They include family medical history, dietary habits and lifestyle choices. Each, in their own ways, can contribute to the accumulation of plaque in the arteries, increasing the risk of heart attacks and other cardiovascular problems.

Still, the symptoms and outcomes of heart disease can significantly differ between men and women. For instance, women tend to develop cardiovascular issues seven to ten years later than men. For whatever reason, society tends to think of heart disease as an issue for men — meaning some women may overlook or downplay obvious symptoms. So, stay on schedule with regular wellness check-ups with your individual healthcare provider. They



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can help identify potential issues and create a tailored treatment plan if an issue arises.

FOR WOMEN

One in 16 women aged 20 and older is affected by coronary heart disease. Those women may experience symptoms such as shortness of breath more frequently while at rest or even during sleep.

Pregnancy is a complicating factor. Conditions such as eclampsia or preeclampsia while pregnant can put significant stress on the cardiovascular system, sometimes doubling the risk of heart attack or stroke. Postmenopausal women may also experience a rare issue with the structure of the heart muscle: Takotsubo cardiomyopathy can be triggered by

severe emotional stress and may mimic heart attack symptoms.

FOR MEN

Common symptoms for both men and women include nausea, sweating, and shortness of breath. But half of the men who experience sudden death from coronary heart disease show no prior symptoms. This concerning statistic

underscores the need for regular health check-ups. Men need to communicate openly with their healthcare providers regarding symptoms and any health issues. Note chest or upper back pain, swollen ankles, extreme fatigue and palpitations. Lifestyle factors such as poor diet and excessive alcohol consumption are significant contributors to heart disease in men.

Why Slowing Down Matters

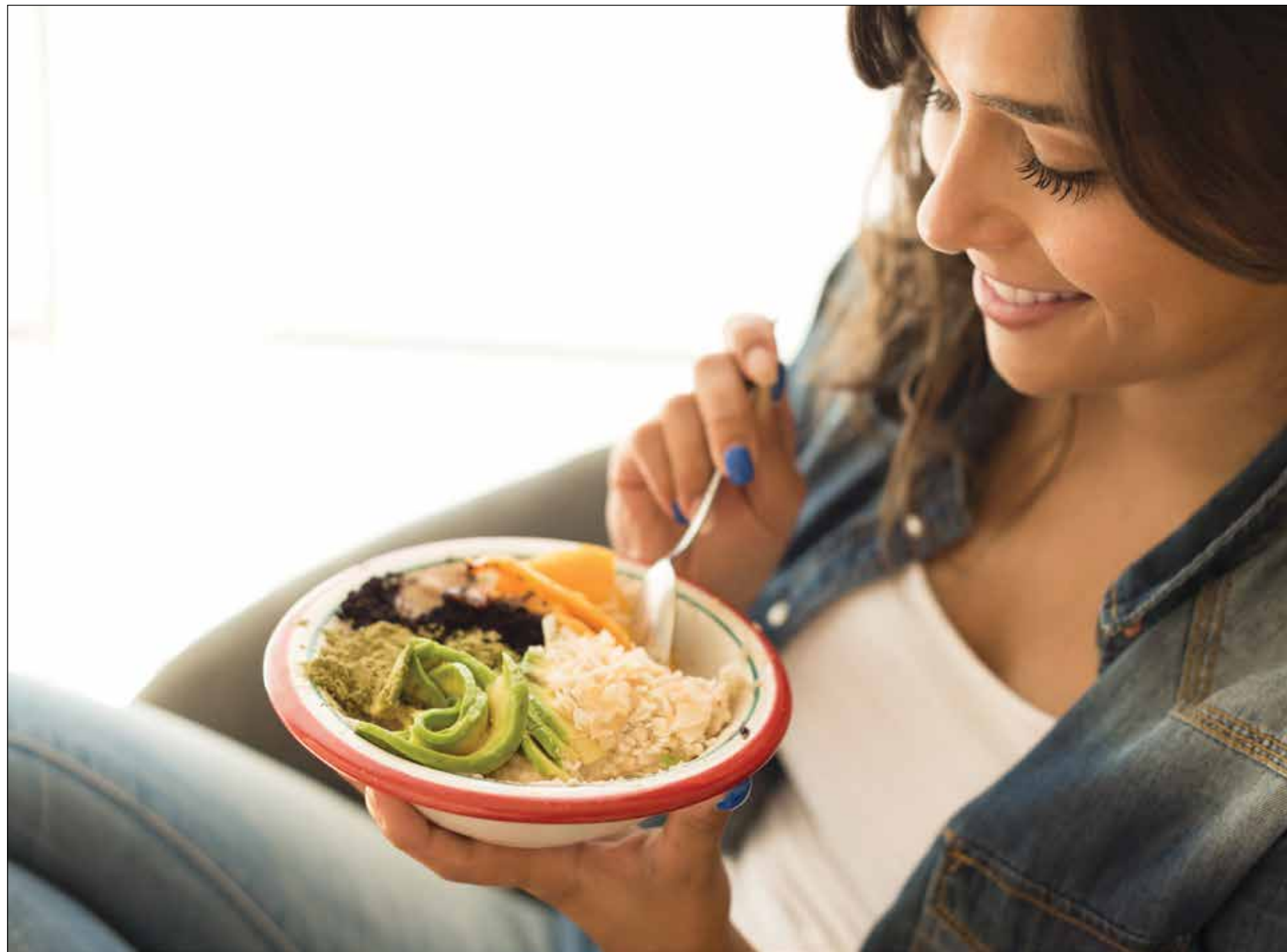
Warming weather means the return of outdoor fun — and outdoor food including picnics, cookouts and barbecues.

But in your rush to enjoy the springtime temps, remember to slow down while you're eating. This isn't just an attempt to find your seasonal zen. Experts say rapid ingestion actually carries significant health risks.

GOING TOO FAST

Among the negative effects of eating too quickly are relatively common things like digestive issues, including indigestion and heartburn. You can experience weight gain, since consuming food quickly can often lead to overeating. You may swallow more air than normal, leading to gas and bloating. Some people experience nutrient deficiencies: Those who eat too fast might not be giving their bodies the needed time to properly break down and absorb food.

Slowing down may help you lose weight. Studies have shown that both men and women ate less when they reduced their eating speed. Some experts believe that's because it takes approximately 20 minutes for the brain to register feelings of fullness. By moderating your pace,



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you're allowing more time for this signal to be activated. When the signal is activated, it leads to reduced food intake, which can have positive health implications.

SERIOUS ISSUES

Eating quickly can lead to unwanted and potentially fatal health complications. For

instance, those who don't slow down are putting themselves at a higher risk of developing Metabolic Syndrome. This cluster of conditions includes high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol levels and high blood sugar. Eating too fast has been proven to be a contributing factor in heart disease, diabetes and several

types of cancer.

WHAT TO DO

Ready to slow down? Start by setting aside plenty of time for each meal, so that you never feel rushed. Concentrate on chewing each bite as thoroughly as possible before swallowing. Drink water after every few bites. This will help

you pace yourself while also aiding in digestion. If possible, try to find a quieter, more comfortable place to eat. Otherwise, opt for noise-canceling headphones and some relaxing tunes — but avoid common distractions like your phone, the television or laptop. You might speed up again while not paying attention.

Your Lifestyle and Stroke

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that a stroke occurs every 40 seconds in the United States, with a death every four minutes.

Most strokes result from a blockage or rupture of a blood vessel supplying the brain, so that's the focus for many people. But the connection between the human heart and brain is significant. These two vital organs depend on one another to function. A stroke can be triggered by issues with your heart, as heart disease and irregular rhythms are now understood to be critical risk factors. Here's how to adopt a lifestyle that minimizes your stroke risk while promoting heart health:

BETTER CHOICES

Experts report that smokers are at twice the risk of experiencing a stroke compared to nonsmokers. That's why it's so important to quit smoking. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you're having trouble quitting, talk to your healthcare provider about cessation strategies. Meanwhile, some studies have indicated that very moderate alcohol consumption can offer some health benefits. Excessive drinking, on the other hand, significantly increases the risk of stroke. That's because overindulgence is associated with



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elevated blood pressure, a common trigger. Moderation has been defined as no more than two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women.

EATING WELL

Unhealthy diets tend to increase the likelihood of stroke, as well as hypertension and heart disease. Create a new

diet plan that's both calorie-conscious and heart-healthy. Start with a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and low-fat dairy products. Limit your sodium intake to less than 2,300mg per day. Added sugars should be less than 10 percent of your daily caloric intake. Restrict saturated fats to less than 10 percent of your

daily calories.

GET MOVING

There's a clear correlation between being overweight or obese and the risk of stroke. Incorporate more physical activity into your everyday routine to aid in weight management. Experts advise that we get 2 hours and 30

minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise every week. Things like brisk walking, swimming and jogging qualify as moderate intensity. If you're struggling to maintain a healthy level of activity, consider turning exercise into social activities by inviting friends along. Everyone will benefit from a renewed focus on cardiovascular health.

Heart Healthy at Any Age

The risk of conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke tend to rise as we grow older, but being proactive about your cardiovascular health is smart at any age.

Treat it as a lifelong endeavor. After all, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that about half of all Americans are living with at least one of the three primary risk factors for cardiovascular issues: high cholesterol, high blood pressure and smoking. Here are some recommendations on fostering a healthier lifestyle into old age:

YOUNG PEOPLE

Start your journey by adopting a healthy lifestyle. Develop a workout routine that includes both cardiovascular and strength training exercises, and then progressively challenge yourself with more advanced workouts. Start a schedule of regular health check-ups, establishing a timeline with your healthcare provider. Annual physical examinations enable them to track your blood pressure, heart rate and cholesterol levels through the years. This ensures that any changes are quickly noted.

YOUNGER ADULTS

Balancing it all can become



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difficult as you build a career and family of your own. Take the opportunity to promote healthy habits in the office and at home. Explore nutritious meal options for family dinners and engage in group activities such as hiking, biking or neighborhood walks. Your children will develop positive habits as they grow, and you'll be able to better manage stress at work. Remember, elevated heart rates

can lead to dangerously high blood pressure levels.

MIDDLE AGE

Monitoring your weight becomes more important during this era. You may notice a decrease in your metabolism, making it more challenging to maintain your old waistline. Develop and maintain a balanced diet. Continue your exercise regimen, even if that

means finding new routines that better match your age and ability. Monitor your sleep patterns. Issues with getting enough rest can lead to high blood pressure, stroke and heart disease. (Sleep apnea affects one in five adults.) Snoring can be an early indicator of underlying issues.

RETIREMENT

Into retirement, it's even

more important to remain proactive with regular wellness checks. Communicate any concerns with your healthcare provider. Remember that symptoms of heart disease may not always be as apparent as other age-related issues. Our bodies are always changing. Follow your doctor's latest recommendations regarding diet, medication and physical activity.

Small Changes, Big Results

Sometimes getting started on a healthier path is the hardest part.

The tendency is to think in terms of huge changes — particularly if you've let things slide for a long time. But improving your heart health doesn't require a complete lifestyle transformation. Begin by taking smaller, more manageable steps and you'll still see significant improvements over time. You'll also have a better chance of sticking with your new regimen. Here's how:

IT'S A PROCESS

Developing bad habits took a while, and so will unlearning them. Still, progressively adopting healthier practices will lead to positive changes that motivate you to continue. Before making any decisions, have a conversation with your physician about the plan to improve your heart health. They'll be able to factor in any known risk factors while creating a new diet and exercise routine. This is particularly important for those who are at high risk or are already managing heart disease.

MAKING TIME

Our hectic schedules make it easy to constantly postpone exercise, but time really isn't as big a factor as you might think. You can easily elevate your heart rate without taking part in any formal workout session. In fact, easy opportunities to

get your blood flowing and improve your heart health present themselves throughout your day. Consider taking a short walk during your lunch break. You'll be taking advantage of the improving spring weather while becoming more active. You could also choose a more distant parking spot.

When looking for a space, try to end up as far away from the entrance as possible. Those additional steps accumulate over time, as you quietly improve your cardiovascular fitness.

EATING BETTER

Being overweight is a risk

factor for heart disease — but it's important not to resort to fad diets. They may have short-term effects but are far more difficult to maintain over time. Instead, once again focus on smaller, more achievable goals. Prepare light and healthy lunches before heading into school or the office.

Make sure they're easy to warm up and eat, with plenty of variety so you're not encouraged to snack between meals. Start foregoing dessert and limit sugary drinks, since those are just empty calories. Replace them with an extra portion of vegetables or lean proteins.



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