

# Healthy Heart

## Benefits of loving your heart

- By taking care of your heart, you can decrease your risk for a stroke or heart disease.
- You can also prevent fatty buildup of lipids (like cholesterol and triglycerides).
- Last but not least, you can improve blood flow, overall circulation, energy levels, and performance.

## Why should I be concerned?

If left untreated, inflammation and high lipid levels can speed up the process of atherosclerosis, the hardening of the arteries. Arterial damage and fat deposits can lead to plaque buildups on your artery walls, causing them to narrow and stiffen. This will make your heart work harder with each beat and stress your entire cardiovascular system.

## Simple steps to loving your heart

### Avoid or limit exposure to nicotine and tobacco.

- Smoking increases your risk because it accelerates the hardening of your arteries.
- Visit [healthyhorns.utexas.edu/quitters](http://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/quitters) for resources to help you quit smoking.

### Go nuts and go fish: Aim for at least one rich source of omega-3 fat in your diet every day.

- Omega-3 and monounsaturated fats can help improve your heart health.
- Good sources of omega-3s are fatty freshwater fish (e.g., salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines), flaxseeds, walnuts, chia, and hemp.
- Good sources of monounsaturated fats are nuts, seeds, avocados, olive oil, canola oil, and olives.

### Fiber up.

- Soluble fiber helps to lower cholesterol levels in the body by physically trapping and removing it.
- Good sources of soluble fiber are oats, oatmeal, rye, sweet potatoes, peas, beans, lentils, bananas, apples, pears, berries, broccoli, and carrots.

### Don't forget the produce!

- A diet rich in fruits and vegetables is known to reduce the risk of heart disease.
- Fruits and vegetables provide important antioxidants and phytonutrients that reduced inflammation and may prevent the progression of heart disease.
- Make small, gradual increases for an ultimate goal of 5-9 half cup servings each day.

### Get physical and reduce stress.

- Proper sleep, stress management, and enjoyable physical activity can help to improve your cholesterol levels.
- Exercise can help to manage stress and raise beneficial HDL cholesterol. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity per week.

### Drink alcohol in moderation.

- One drink equals 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. wine, or 1.5 oz. liquor. Note that high gravity beers equate to more than one drink.
- Moderation for men means one to two drinks a day.
- For women that means one drink per day.
- Sorry folks, but no you can't save your daily drinks for the weekend.

### Save food and drinks low in nutrients and high in calories for special occasions.

- Foods lower in nutrient density and higher in calories don't give your body what it needs in the right amounts to stay healthy. This includes fried foods, sweets and desserts, sugar sweetened beverages, and highly processed meats (think sausage, bacon, baloney). Depending on your needs, these foods should only make up 140-250 calories or less of your daily intake.
- Instead, aim for nutrient dense foods to make up 80-90% of your daily intake including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, fish, low-fat dairy and moderate portions of lean meats.

### Learn more.

- The American Heart Association website ([heart.org](http://heart.org)) has a variety of information including tips for healthy living and facts about conditions like high cholesterol and diabetes.