

HEALTH MATTERS

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Heart Health February 2025

February is American Heart Month, a time to raise awareness about the importance of cardiovascular well-being. The heart works nonstop, pumping blood rich in oxygen and nutrients while clearing away waste. Despite its resilience, it remains vulnerable to damage from poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking, infections, and genetics.

A leading threat is atherosclerosis, where cholesterol-laden plaques build up in arteries, restricting blood flow. If a plaque ruptures, it can trigger a heart attack or stroke. While cardiovascular disease becomes more common with

age, it's not inevitable. Embracing a heart-healthy lifestyle, especially early on, can significantly reduce the risk. Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and medical care can help manage conditions like high blood pressure and cholesterol, keeping the heart strong for years to come.

The American Heart Association highlights "Life's Essential 8" as fundamental steps to support heart health. Following these guidelines can lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, and other serious health issues, contributing to overall well-being.

Prioritize Nutrition

Focus on a balanced diet rich in whole foods, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, nuts, and seeds. Opt for healthier cooking oils like olive or canola instead of tropical oils.

Stay Active

Adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week. Children need 60 minutes of daily physical exercise, including play and structured exercise.

Eliminate Tobacco

Smoking and vaping are the leading causes of preventable death in the U.S., contributing to a third of all heart disease-related fatalities. Secondhand smoke exposure also poses significant health risks, especially for children.

Get Quality Sleep

Adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night, while children require more, depending on their age. Proper rest supports healing, brain function, and reduces the risk of chronic diseases.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

A balanced weight benefits overall health. Body mass index (BMI) is a helpful tool to assess weight relative to height, with an optimal BMI below 25.

Healthcare professionals can assist in evaluating weight goals.

Regulate Cholesterol

High non-HDL ("bad") cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease. Healthcare providers often monitor non-HDL cholesterol as a key indicator since it doesn't require fasting for accurate measurement.

Control Blood Sugar

Excess glucose in the bloodstream can harm the heart, kidneys, eyes, and nerves. Monitoring hemoglobin A1c levels provides a better picture of long-term blood sugar control, particularly for those with diabetes or prediabetes.

Keep Blood Pressure in Check

Healthy blood pressure levels are below 120/80 mm Hg. Readings of 130-139 mm Hg systolic or 80-89 mm Hg diastolic indicate high blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

This February, American Heart Month reminds us that heart-healthy habits today can ensure a stronger, healthier tomorrow.

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