

Ten Tips to Take to Heart

By Woodland Publishing, Inc.

The average human heart beats 100,000 times and pumps 2,000 gallons of blood each day. But how long a heart keeps this up is largely influenced by a person's lifestyle. The following are the top 10 things to ensure that your heart keeps pumping for many years to come:

1. **Brush and floss daily.** The American Academy of Periodontology reports that people with periodontal disease are twice as likely to have coronary artery disease. Other research shows that oral-health problems are reliable predictors of heart disease.
2. **Relax.** Circumstantial evidence links heart disease and stress, according to Richard N. Fogoros, M.D. You may not be able to eliminate stress, but you can manage it. Relax with breathing exercises, stretching, yoga, meditation or a massage.
3. **Sleep soundly.** Don't neglect your beauty sleep—it's a luxury you can't live without. According to the *Harvard Heart Letter*, poor sleep can lead to heart disease.
4. **Maintain a healthy weight.** According to the American Heart Association (AHA), obesity increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, even in the absence of other risk factors. Lose a few pounds if you need to, and then adjust your lifestyle to maintain a healthy weight.
5. **Get up and move.** Exercise strengthens the heart and reduces blood pressure and cholesterol. But according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 60 percent of American adults are not regularly active. Incorporate physical activity into your life each day.
6. **Start a fitness routine.** Increased activity is good, but regular exercise is better. The American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate activity five days per week. Exercise doesn't have to be a chore; dancing, swimming, biking and team sports are all enjoyable ways to get the heart pumping.
7. **Avoid "bad" foods.** The first step to a heart healthy diet is to eliminate foods that can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. The AHA recommends limiting saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and cholesterol.
8. **Choose "good" foods.** Feed your heart with fruits, vegetables and whole grains. These foods provide heart-healthy fiber, vitamins and minerals. The Food and Drug Administration recommends getting fats from plant oils, nuts and seeds. These contain unsaturated fats that may reduce the risk of heart disease.
9. **Supplement wisely.** Supplements can turbo charge a heart-healthy diet. Research has associated many supplements, such as folic acid, vitamin B12 and coenzyme Q-10, with heart benefits. Consult a nutritionist or physician to find out which supplements are best for you.
10. **Quit smoking.** The AHA calls smoking "the most important preventable cause of premature death in the United States." Smoking increases blood pressure, increases the blood's tendency to clot and decreases HDL ("good") cholesterol. Even secondhand smoke can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. For a healthy heart, avoid all exposure to tobacco.