

# Heart Smarts: Quick Tips to Stay Heart Healthy

1st June 2020

The jury is in and the statistics about heart disease are certainly a cause for concern: The good news is your risk for developing heart disease can be, in many cases, greatly reduced by keeping a finger on the pulse of some simple preventive steps, and practising heart smarts.

Get off the couch. It's no secret that exercise prevents heart disease, but for many it's still not a priority. It doesn't matter if you're biking, walking, running, or swimming; find something you enjoy and do it, but be sure to consult your health professional or doctor before starting a new program. Just 30 to 60 minutes a day can lower your chances of heart disease and help you feel and look your best.

Stop smoking! Approximately 21,000 people in Australia die prematurely each year because of smoking—that's 1 in every 8 deaths. Quitting smoking is a challenge, but it can be a lot easier when you have a plan for quitting and the support to put that plan into action. The good news is that as soon as you quit smoking, your risk of heart disease drops.

Fill up on fibre. Consuming foods high in fibre helps with digestion, maintaining a healthy body weight, and lowering your risk for cardiovascular disease. Stock up on fibrous foods, such as legumes, vegetables, fruit, and whole grain products.

Go local. People who eat local produce have been found to have healthier eating behaviours. Colourful, home or local-grown foods provide flavour, variety, and nutrients to your meals. They're also rich in fibre, vitamin C, and beta-carotene, as well as antioxidants—all of which can help reduce the buildup of plaque in your arteries and prevent heart disease.

Watch your waistline. You don't need professional equipment if you want to get an idea of whether or not you're at risk of atherosclerosis—the hardening of arteries that increases your chances of getting heart disease. Instead, it can be as simple as getting out the measuring tape and scale.

People who are overweight—and in particular those who tend to carry weight in their midsection, and have a waistline of more than 80 centimetres for women or more than 94 centimetres for men—are much more likely to suffer from a heart attack or heart

© LifeWorks 2020

heartbeat<sup>+</sup>

# Heart Smarts: Quick Tips to Stay Heart Healthy

1st June 2020

disease than those who maintain a healthy body mass index (BMI).

Try to get into the routine of attending annual physical examinations with your doctor, it'll help monitor your overall health so that changes can be assessed and treated proactively. Remember to set realistic goals and to stay positive—even a modest 5 to 10 percent off your body weight can cut your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Step out of the stress lane. Stress can put the body into "emergency mode," raising blood cholesterol and blood pressure, and ultimately taking its toll on your heart. Put daily stressors like traffic, queues, and deadlines into perspective and take a few deep breaths. If you're having trouble finding inner calm or are bogged down with bigger issues, maybe it's time to seek advice from a health professional so that you can access insight and expertise to help you cope.

Identify causes for concern. Don't wait until it's too late to learn the warning signs of heart disease. Most people are aware of the more "typical" symptoms such as shortness of breath, pain, or pressure in the chest or upper body (neck, jaw, arms, shoulder). What you may not know are the subtler signs of heart problems or a heart attack. Less clear-cut symptoms—often more commonly reported among women—include indigestion, nausea, back or jaw pain, light-headedness, or cold, clammy skin. If you experience these symptoms see a doctor immediately.

Knowing the warning signs of heart disease is important and can help reduce your risk of developing more serious heart problems. Getting serious about heart health through preventive steps, such as exercising, quitting smoking, eating well, maintaining a healthy weight, and reducing stress can lower your chances of experiencing them first-hand. Remember: small changes not only add up to reduce the likelihood of developing heart disease, but can also bring balance to your life and improve your overall physical and emotional health.

© LifeWorks 2020

heartbeat+