Take Care of Your Heart This Valentine's Day

January 20, 2025

Red paper decorations with scalloped lace. Heart-shaped candies imprinted with sweet nothings. Hallmark cards oozing with affection. February is the month of love. What better time to share tips on heart health?

Before we get to the tips, let's talk facts. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. The death rate from heart disease increased in both 2023 and 2024, with 2023 seeing the largest single-year increase since 2015, according to the American Heart Association.

High blood pressure is the leading cause. Fortunately, it can be controlled with medication and lifestyle changes like eating a heart-healthy diet and exercising. However, only 25 percent of diagnosed people have their high blood pressure under control, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many do not take their medication consistently. If you are one of the millions of Americans taking medication for high blood pressure, try

using a day-of-the-week box or an app like Medisafe or CareZone to help you remember. Doctors also recommend taking your medication at the same time every day, like when you brush your teeth.

Whether or not you have high blood pressure, everyone can stand to benefit from the following lifestyle habits that positively impact heart health.

Prioritize Nutrition.

Many diets can accomplish heart-healthy goals, but it may be more helpful to talk about common denominators rather than a specific diet. Nutritionists agree that it is vital to limit saturated fats. This means cutting down on high-fat dairy, fatty meats, and processed foods. Additionally, it is important to eat foods high in fiber like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. And don't forget to drink water. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends 11.5 cups of water per day for women and 15.5 cups for men.

Make Exercise Part of Your Routine.

Because it improves circulation and strengthens the heart muscle, exercise should be a part of your weekly routine. It can also help you maintain a healthy weight, a bonus for the heart. The type of exercise depends on the person. For example, people with low bone density

should focus on weight-bearing exercise, while those with joint pain might prefer swimming. Experts recommend 150 minutes of fitness per week.

Good Sleep Matters.

Everyone has occasional poor sleep, but an ongoing habit can put your health at risk. During regular sleep, your blood pressure drops. Not getting the recommended seven to nine hours of nightly sleep can lead to high blood pressure. Research also shows a link between poor sleep and poor eating habits, another contributor to heart disease.

See Your Medical Practitioner Regularly.

Being proactive helps your heart, too. Stay up to date with your routine doctor appointments and screenings. For heart health this includes monitoring blood pressure and cholesterol levels and talking with your doctor regularly.

Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle.

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease. Alcohol is also recognized as a contributor to poor health outcomes, including heart disease. Doctors recommend limiting alcohol intake. And though not always easy, reducing stress is

important, too. Find a way to reduce stress that works for you. This might be meditation, yoga, walking outside, or spending time with loved ones and friends.