

Be Heart Smart

With the holidays over, it's a great time to focus on heart health. Taking some simple steps can do a world of good – here are some quick tips to get you started.

Keep your diet simple. Eat a healthy, balanced diet that consists of a variety of natural/whole foods, including plenty of vegetables and fruit, a variety of protein sources including lower fat dairy and alternatives, lean meat, poultry and fish, and whole grains. Avoid highly processed foods.

Planning makes perfect. Plan your meals each week and make a list before heading to the grocery store. Cook healthy meals in bigger batches and freeze them.

Sip smart. Reach for water or lower fat milk when you're thirsty. Skip sugar-loaded beverages including soft drinks, fruit drinks and specialty teas and coffees; they're high in added sugar with no nutritional value.

Find what moves you. No need to go to a gym, just do whatever you enjoy – any activity can have a positive impact. And remember, if you are pressed for time, you can work in 10-minute activity bouts.

Mix it up. Try new foods such as a new fruit or vegetable each time you shop, and choose a new recipe to try each week. Vary your exercise as well: yard work one day, an exercise class the next, and a ski or bike ride after that. Play in the park with the kids or go for a nice long walk.

Live smoke free. Smoking triples the risk of dying from heart disease and stroke in middle-aged men and women. But within 24 hours your chances of having a heart attack start to go down. Within 5 years your risk of having a stroke will be nearly that of a non-smoker; and within 15 years your risk of heart disease will be similar to someone who has never smoked at all.

Avoid excessive alcohol consumption. Heavy drinking and binge drinking are risk factors for high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. Alcohol may also cause problems by interacting with your medications. If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to no more than two drinks a day, to a weekly maximum of 10 for women; for men, limit yourself to three drinks a day, to a weekly maximum of 15.

Recognize and handle your stress. Stress is a part of life for just about everyone. Sometimes it is not easy to recognize stress because we are caught up in the flow of life. Recognize your stressors is an important step. The next step is to find coping strategies to help you manage your stress.

Learn the signs of heart attack

Every year, thousands of people in Canada die from heart attacks. Learning the signs of a heart attack and getting fast medical attention can save your life, or the life of someone you love.

<https://www.heartandstroke.ca/>

Learn the signs of heart attack



Chest discomfort
Pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain, burning or heaviness



Sweating



Upper body discomfort
Neck, jaw, shoulder, arms, back



Nausea



Shortness of breath



Light-headedness

For both men and women, the most common heart attack sign is chest pain or discomfort.

However, women can experience a heart attack without chest pressure.

Women take note, you may experience:

- Pressure or pain in the lower chest or upper abdomen
- Dizziness
- Light-headedness or fainting
- Upper back pressure
- Extreme fatigue

If you experience any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.



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