

Heart smarts: quick tips to stay heart healthy

The jury is in and the statistics are certainly a cause for concern: Heart disease kills thousands of Americans every year and is the leading cause of death for both men and women. The good news is your risk for developing heart disease can be, in many cases, greatly reduced by keeping your pulse on some simple preventative steps, and practicing 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 physician 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. Even small changes, like taking the stairs at work instead of the elevator, or opting for a walk instead of grabbing that taxi can, over time, add up to make a difference.

Butt out! Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States; 480,000 Americans die prematurely each year because of smoking according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 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 fiber. Consuming foods high in fiber 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 behaviors. Not only are you supporting the local economy, but you also get more flavorful tastes from fruits and vegetables grown nearby, and as a bonus they often contain more nutrients than ones that have taken a long journey in the back of a truck. Colorful, home-grown foods provide flavor, variety and nutrients to your meals. They're also rich in fiber, 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.

Let us help. Access your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) 24/7 by phone or web.

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. Men and women who are overweight — and in particular those who tend to carry weight in their midsection, and have a waistline of more than 35 inches for women or more than 40 inches for men — are much more likely to suffer from a heart attack or heart 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. You can also work with your health professional to find out what your healthy weight is, and then develop a plan to stay on a heart healthy track. Remember to set realistic goals and to stay positive — even a modest 5 to 10 percent off of 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, line-ups and deadlines into perspective and take a few deep breaths. Better still, burn anxious energy, boost mood-lifting endorphins and get your heart positively pumping with a dose of daily physical activity. 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.

Spot the signs of trouble. 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, lightheadedness or cold, clammy skin. If you experience these symptoms, call 9-1-1 or 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 preventative steps, such as exercising, quitting smoking, eating well, maintaining a healthy weight and reducing stress can lower your chances of experiencing them firsthand.

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.

Let us help. Access your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) 24/7 by phone or web.

Relationships in a digital world

Technology has changed the way we communicate. Texting, emails, video calls and especially social media have become the new norms, replacing telephones and face-to-face conversations. These digital means of communication have also changed the way we develop and maintain relationships.

Just 20 years ago, most of us had a handful of close friends and a larger circle of acquaintances (neighbors, coworkers, business associates etc.). Today, that circle is even larger, with hundreds of virtual friends through social media and digital connections.

While digital technology has tremendous benefits, it can also hamper our ability to establish and maintain relationships in the real world.

Advantages of relationships in the digital world

- **Maintain family and cultural ties.** Many of us have family members across the country or around the globe. This can increase any feelings of alienation and loneliness. But social media allows grandparents in India and cousins in the United States to be part of our daily lives and for us to stay connected to our culture and roots.
- **Find old friends and make new ones.** One of the key elements for good mental health is having supportive friends. Even the shyest person can meet new people online.
- **Improve our self-esteem.** Don't we all feel good when our posts receive several "likes" or positive comments or our complaints receive sympathy?

The downside of relationships in the digital world

As more people are choosing screen-to-screen relationships over face-to-face ones, so more are finding the complexities and nuances of real life interactions increasingly difficult. In fact, electronic devices and the online world can be barriers to how we interact in the real world and actually inhibit the development of deep, meaningful and lasting relationships. Online "friends" or "followers" rarely know us well or care deeply about our well-being. They can't replace real-life confidants and loved ones.

The digital world also allows us to present an edited or idealized version of ourselves or only communicate what we want people to know. No one sees and hears our less than perfect moments.

Keeping digital relationships real

While the digital world allows us to stay in touch with old friends, share your interests with new friends, and increase your professional network it's important to continue developing and nurturing relationships in the real world. The secret is balance. Try the following tips:

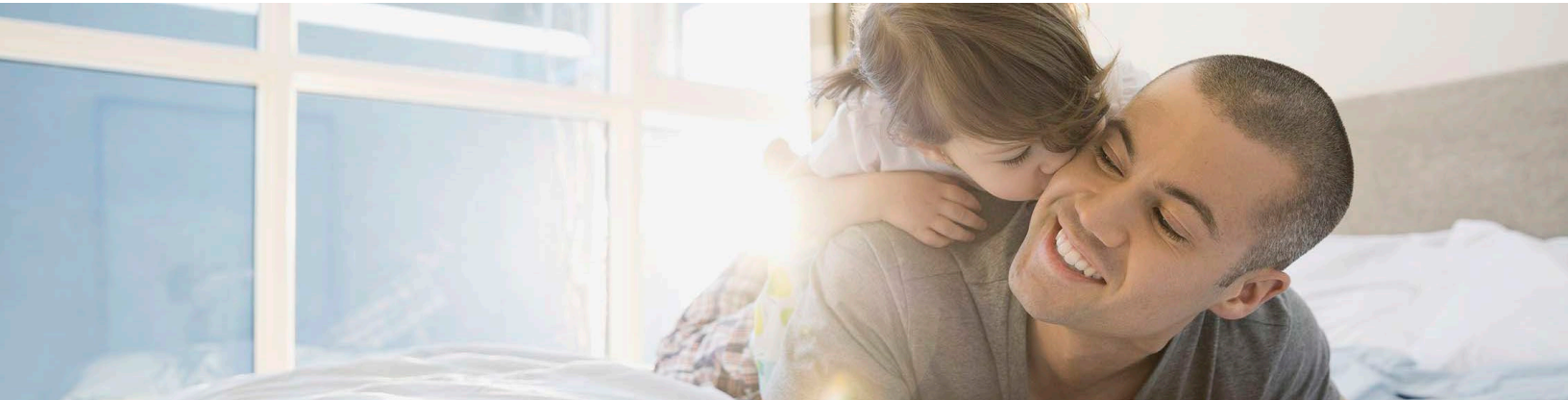
- **Keep online relationships in perspective.** Online relationships are no substitute for real-life ones. An emoji or acronym such as LOL can't replace shedding a tear or a laugh with a trusted friend or family member. The digital world may connect us with hundreds of people, but it can also increase our sense of social isolation.

Let us help. Access your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) 24/7 by phone or web.

- **Find offline ways to boost confidence.** It's great when people in our online community "like" or "share" our posts, but we can become so accustomed to receiving constant validation online that we expect it offline as well. In addition, basing our opinion of ourselves on other people's values instead of our own can make us unhappy. Instead we need to focus on self-validation. We can do this in many ways, including:
- **Creating a support system.** We need to surround ourselves with people who accept us for who we are, believe in us, listen to our problems and support us. If you need help, contact your Employee Assistance Program for resources and support.
- **Stop judging ourselves.** While it's good to be realistic and acknowledge both our shortcomings and our strengths, it's not beneficial to constantly criticize ourselves. When your inner voice becomes harsh or negative – "I'm a failure," "I'm an idiot" – remind yourself that you'd never say those words to someone else. Instead, say "I'm only human and am doing my best." Our imperfections make us unique and our mistakes help us grow.
- **Helping others.** Seeing the positive impact we have on others is the best form of validation.
- **Limit time online.** The digital world can be an essential business tool as well as fun and entertaining. It can also encroach on all aspects of our lives. It's hard not to respond to every email and text alert. Make a pact that the whole family unplugs for an hour every evening or on Saturdays. Instead, spend time together – play board games, get outside or simply have dinner together and catch up on the day.

The digital world can, if used properly, enhance your real-world relationships – for example, Skype allows far-flung family and friends to speak face-to-face and social media platforms provide a means to share updates, news, photographs and videos. However, online relationships cannot replace real-world interactions that contribute to the development of deep, meaningful and lasting relationships. It's important to find a balance.

Let us help. Access your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) 24/7 by phone or web.



Online featured reads

Simple steps to cut Cancer risk

Taking care of yourself is an investment you can't afford to postpone, especially given estimates that 30 per cent to 35 per cent of cancers can be prevented by living a healthy lifestyle. [Keep reading.](#)

Featured webinars



Managing teleworkers: for managers

February 8, 2019 1:00 pm CST

[Register](#)



Professional use of texting

February 22, 2019 1:00 pm CST

[Register](#)