



Tips for a Heart-Healthy Lifestyle

Few things in life are as important as a healthy heart. Sometimes, though, it's hard to know where to start to make the lifestyle improvements that will have a positive effect on your heart. Here are a few tips to get you going.

Eat to live. We all know the foods we eat—and how much we eat of certain types of food—have a big impact on our health. If you're concerned about heart health, your doctor can recommend the best diet for you, based on your age, gender, current health and so forth. Here are a couple to consider:

- **DASH** (dietary approaches to stop hypertension) helps to lower your blood pressure, which can decrease the risks of heart disease. For more information, go to adventisthealth.org/simi-valley, type "dash" in the box labeled "Search," then click on the article titled "Managing High Blood Pressure With the DASH Diet."

- **TLC** (therapeutic lifestyle changes) focuses on lowering cholesterol. For more information, go to nhlbi.nih.gov and search "tlc."

It's also important to limit the amount of salt in your diet. Many experts suggest eating no more than 1,500 milligrams of salt per day; that's about $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon. This includes not just the salt you add to food, but the salt that is already in the prepared foods you eat.

Break a sweat. Exercising on a regular basis doesn't just feel good—it gives you a stronger, healthier heart and also helps your lungs, circulation and many other important functions within your body. Remember: You should always talk with your doctor before beginning any exercise program. He or she will help you decide which types of exercise are best and safest for you.

The American Heart Association recommends 40 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise* three to four times a week to help lower your blood pressure and cholesterol—both of which have a big effect on your heart health. If you can't keep to that schedule at first, do what you can, and work up to doing more exercise each week. Any exercise is better than none at all.

** Examples of aerobic exercise include brisk walking, running, biking, swimming, dancing, and working out on elliptical trainers or other aerobic workout machines.*

over →

Heart-Healthy Lifestyle Changes



Kick the habit. Smoking contributes to heart disease, lung disease, certain types of cancers and other serious health problems. It's never too late to stop smoking, no matter how many years you've been a smoker. Ventura County offers an effective and free smoking cessation program. For more information, call 805-201-7867 or email callitquits@ventura.org.

See your doctor. Regular visits to your primary care physician can make a tremendous difference in your health, including your heart health. Through physical examinations and laboratory tests, your doctor can often spot health issues before they become serious. He or she can also direct you to programs and services that will help you live a healthier lifestyle. If you don't have a primary care physician, call the Adventist Health Simi Valley physician referral line, toll-free, at 866-987-0120.

Know your numbers. Having information about your health can help you and your physician make the best choices for your healthy lifestyle. It's important to check your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar level, body mass index and other key numbers on a regular basis. Your doctor can do this for you, or you can often get tested through your workplace or through free screenings at community health fairs and other events.

Dial down on stress. In today's busy world, it's almost impossible to avoid stress. But when you let it overtake you, stress causes negative changes inside your body that can lead to heart disease and many other health problems.

Here are a few ideas to lower your stress level:

- **Take time to talk with other people**—and share your concerns with people you trust.

- **Get regular exercise.** A brief walk can clear your head and help you work through problems.
- **Do something kind for another person.** A small gift, a word of encouragement, a smile—all of these help you get outside of your own problems.
- **Let yourself sleep.** Make sure you're making time in your schedule to get a healthy night's sleep on a regular basis.
- **Laugh.** Watch a funny movie. Go out with your friends. Be silly. Nothing reduces stress like a good laugh.

For many more tips and further information, go online to the American Heart Association at heart.org and search "heart healthy lifestyle."

If you're experiencing the signs of a heart attack, call 911 immediately!

Do not call your doctor, the hospital, or a friend or family member.