

Get Heart Smart

BY CARRIE ANTON

There's no tougher time of year to make healthy choices than the holidays. Beat by beat, these tips make doing the right thing easy.

As the most vital organ in your body, your heart needs—and deserves!—some TLC every single day. “Chronic illnesses, including heart disease, are as much as 80% due to lifestyle choices,” says preventive cardiologist Joel K. Kahn, MD, a clinical professor at Wayne State University School of Medicine and the author of *Your Whole Heart Solution*. Keep your finger on the pulse of good cardio health by incorporating these smart moves into your routine around the clock.

Heart Health 101

- Get aerobic exercise
- Ditch bad dietary fats
- Stop smoking
- Drop pounds

7 a.m.

Get Some Kneaded Relief

While you might be tempted to head straight out of the bedroom and start your day, take a few minutes for light stretching, yoga or even a little massage (try a foam roller to loosen tight muscles). Emerging research suggests these types of exercises may be powerful enough to reduce stiffness in your arteries and improve vascular function. What's more, they're relaxing, lowering stress levels, blood pressure and heart rate. To ameliorate overnight kinks and begin the day rejuvenated, certified athletic trainer Robbie Davis, founder of Gameshape, Inc., recommends using a foam roller or tennis ball for 90 seconds to help push away stress. Slowly rock back and forth, spending more time on tight muscles or releasing the stretch if you feel any pain.

9 a.m.

Clear Away Clutter

File piles of mail on your kitchen counter and move stray memos off your desk. Eliminating disorder not only keeps you focused, according to research published in *The Journal of Neuroscience*, but it can also prevent unhealthy coping habits for stress. “When some people are anxious, they smoke cigarettes, drink or make poor food choices,” explains John B. Baker, MD, immediate prior director of invasive/interventional cardiology for AHMC Anaheim Regional



Health: **Prevention**

Medical Center in Orange County, CA. By avoiding angst before it starts, you put a stop to dangerous coping mechanisms.

12 p.m.

Go Green at Lunch

Instead of wolfing down a sandwich at your desk, take a midday break outdoors. Heading for a green space not only reduces stress but will also help add a few more steps to your day. Too swamped to leave your office or home? Bring the greenery indoors by filling your work area with plants, which may make you feel more carefree and less anxious.

3 p.m.

Take a Stand

Sitting is the new smoking. The longer you sit—be it when working, driving or chilling for the night—the less you're doing to stimulate your heart toward better health. Whatever's keeping you sedentary, the 20/2 rule can help you begin to break the cycle. "For every 20 minutes you're sitting or inactive, 2 minutes of standing is required," says Mark Sherwood, ND, co-CEO at the Functional Medical Institute in Tulsa, OK. "Standing up frequently, and even taking short walks throughout the day, forces your heart to respond in a positive, healthy way."

6 p.m.

Spice Up Dinner

Skip the salt and keep taste buds happy by cooking with herbs—they have an anti-inflammatory effect that's good for the heart. Garlic has been shown to lower



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blood pressure and cinnamon can level blood sugar. "The strong flavors in herbs are caused by phytochemicals that can activate cell machinery to remove toxins and repair damage," says Joel Fuhrman, MD, author of *The End of Heart Disease*.

10 p.m.

Zen Out for More Zzz's

Trouble falling, staying or getting enough sleep can increase levels of C-reactive protein (CRP) in your blood, a marker of inflammation in your body. "Higher levels put you at risk for complications from coronary artery disease or plaque in the arteries," says Baker. For a sounder night's sleep, flow into a calming bedtime practice of relaxing yoga postures, each held for 5 to 10 deep belly breaths. With the lights low, try a sequence of child's pose, happy baby pose, and upside-down seal pose. Then lights-out and drift off to restorative rest for 7 to 8 hours.

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