



GENERAL WELLNESS

FIVE TESTED TACTICS (AND SIMPLE GOALS!) TO IMPROVE HEART HEALTH

— By Your Health Staff

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Did you know that every day, your heart pumps approximately 2,000 gallons of blood to organs and cells throughout your body? That's nearly 1.5 gallons each minute!

February is American Heart Month, when we salute this amazing fist-sized muscle and the incredible work it does to keep our bodies moving and grooving.

Unfortunately, American lifestyles tend to skew hard on our hearts, and hearts in the Mid-South take an even bigger beating. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, Mid-Southerners face higher rates of disability and death from heart attack and stroke than anywhere else in the nation, to the tune of high blood pressure in 40% of our adults and a staggering 73% of adults who are overweight or obese.

The good news (yes, there is good news!) is that you can significantly—and permanently—reduce your risk of heart disease, heart failure and other heart-related conditions by making simple changes to your lifestyle.

“Heart disease is the number one killer in the United States, and the main challenge in preventing heart disease is lifestyle,” says Dr. Yehoshua Levine, a Methodist Healthcare cardiac electrophysiologist who treats patients with heart disease daily. “When it comes to our heart health, prevention is better than cure.”

The best news? Lifestyle choices are not genetic, so anyone can improve their heart health with a series of small changes.

One of the best preventive measures lies in making daily, mindful decisions about what you eat and how you move—and the Healthier 901 app offers free, step-by-step programs designed to help you do just that.



Five Ways to Improve Your Heart Health

Healthier 901 also offers tailored content to support Mid-Southerners on the quest for a higher quality of life, like these five tried-and-true tactics to improve heart health:

1. Stress Less

Easier said than done, we know—but ongoing stress can raise your blood pressure, as well as prompting unhealthy coping strategies like drinking, smoking or overeating. Look to yoga, meditation, green tea, fresh air, mindfulness or whatever helps you harness your “energy”. Need pointers? Check out Healthier901's app-based Stress Management program.

Simple goal: This month, spend three minutes a day breathing slowly and deeply. Deep-belly breathing helps us relax and also helps lower blood pressure. (As a bonus, it feels awesome. See for yourself.)

2. Make Some Changes on Your Plate

If you're looking to go full steam ahead on heart-healthy eating, both the DASH diet and the Mediterranean diet are excellent, evidence-based nutritional guides. But you can start with changes as simple as cooking with olive oil instead of butter, replacing red meat at most meals (tag in chicken, fish or beans, oh my!), eating more whole grains and opting for grilled fare over fried when eating out. You'll also do your heart a huge solid by cutting back on sodium, highly refined carbs, saturated fat, sugary drinks—including alcohol—and heavily processed foods.

Simple goal: For the next five days, eat one extra fruit or veggie each day. Yum!

3. Wash, Wash, Wash Your Hands

Hand hygiene has certainly been top of mind in recent years, and that's great news for your ticker. Illnesses like the flu, pneumonia and other infections can be very hard on the heart, so be sure to scrub with soap and water often (and don't forget the tops of your thumbs!).

Simple goal: Floss your teeth daily in February. Gum disease puts you at risk for heart disease, so kill two birds (germs?) with one stone and floss like you mean it.

4. Get a Move On

No, we're not asking you to run five miles a day (although you go, if that's your thing!). But regular, daily physical activity is proven to lower the risk of heart disease and achieving just 2.5 hours of exercise per week means the odds of warding off heart conditions are seriously in your favor. Activities like housekeeping, gardening, walking the dog and taking the stairs all count toward your total—even five minutes of moving can make a positive difference.

Simple goal: Take a 10-minute walk each day this week. Winter weather not your friend? Walk in place while brushing your teeth, lift a heavy book 10 times, have a dance party in your living room or do jumping jacks while waiting for water to boil. Keep track of your physical activity using the Healthier 901 exercise log.

5. Beat The Pack

If you smoke or use smokeless tobacco ... stop. Hands down, not smoking is one of the best things you can do for heart health—and believe it or not, your risk of heart disease can drop just one day after quitting. No matter how long (or how much) you've smoked, you'll see good health benefits the moment you walk away.

Simple goal: If you currently smoke or use tobacco, cut your usage by 10% this month. If this seems easy, keep reducing that number. Your heart will thank you!

Join The Movement!

Wherever you are on your journey to better heart health, remember that small changes today lead to big results over time. Healthier living comes from building good habits you can sustain for the long term—and it also comes from remembering that you don't have to go it alone.

[Join the Healthier 901 movement](#) today to access free, community-based resources designed to help you show your heart the love it deserves.

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