

The Heart of a Healthy Lifestyle

February likely calls to mind Valentine's Day and images of heart-shaped candy boxes and lace-trimmed paper hearts exchanged in classrooms. But the connection between February and hearts goes even deeper.

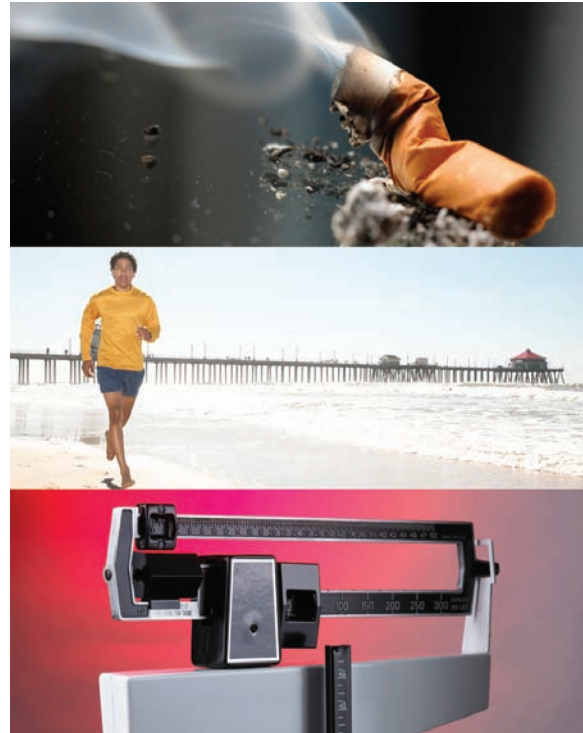
Since 1963, the president has declared February "American Heart Month" in an effort to urge Americans to join the battle against heart diseases. But according to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), only one in five adults practice three key recommended heart-healthy behaviors—regular physical activity, avoiding smoking and weight control.

Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in the United States. Here's a closer look at "the big three" lifestyle habits that can reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Regular Physical Activity

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. To gain the health benefits of exercise—according to the DHHS Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans—adults need

- at least **2 hours and 30 minutes** of **moderate aerobic activity** OR at least **1 hour and 15 minutes** of **vigorous aerobic activity** a week
- AND **muscle strengthening** activities at least **2 days** a week



Physical activity is anything that gets your body moving and your heart rate up. Whether it is included in a structured exercise program, or part of your daily routine—like patrolling—all physical activity adds up to a healthier heart. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program and then, get moving.

Avoiding Smoking

Smoking causes coronary heart disease. And there's more grim news: Smoking causes 90 percent of all lung cancer deaths in men and 80 percent of all lung cancer deaths in women. The adverse health effects from smoking account for nearly 1 of every 5 American deaths each year.

The advice on smoking is clear: Don't. There are a number of ways to quit smoking, from going "cold turkey" to using nicotine replacement products (gums and patches), but there is no easy way. Choose what works best for you, and take quitting one day — even one minute — at a time.

Quitting smoking is hard. In fact, most smokers try to quit many times before they succeed. But you learn something each time you try. Remember that millions of people have quit smoking for good. You can be one of them.

Weight Control

Overweight and obesity are known risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke. About two-thirds of adults in the United States are overweight, and almost one third are obese. For most people, "body mass index" (BMI) — calculated based on height and weight — is a reliable indicator of healthy weight. You can determine yours using the BMI calculator or the BMI Index chart at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing>.

A healthy diet and active lifestyle are your best weapons to control your weight. In simple terms, losing weight depends on using up more calories than you take in. But it's not just about how much you eat, but what you eat. Nutrition matters. For better health, eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, and lean protein sources. Cut back on processed foods, sodium, saturated fats and alcohol.

And be patient. Evidence shows that people who lose weight gradually and steadily (about 1 to 2 pounds per week) are more successful at keeping weight off. Every little bit helps. Reducing your weight by just 5 to 10 percent is likely to produce health benefits. And once you have achieved a healthy weight, your healthy habits can help you keep that weight off over time.

Beyond the Big Three

Getting active, quitting smoking, and controlling your weight can also help reduce your risk for the other major indicators of heart disease: diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Several online sources are available to help assess your current level of health, and guide you toward heart-healthier choices.

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.americanheart.org>

<http://www.smokefree.gov>

<http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines>

Remember, these strategies are not intended to provide medical advice or treatment. Check with your healthcare provider before taking part in behavior and lifestyle changes.

Get Ready to Be an Ex-Smoker

Quitting smoking may be the single most important step you can take to increase your heart health. And it may be the hardest, too. Your chances for successfully kicking the habit are best when you're prepared. Before you quit, START by taking these five important steps:

S = Set a quit date

T = Tell family, friends, and coworkers that you plan to quit

A = Anticipate and plan for the challenges you'll face while quitting

R = Remove cigarettes and other tobacco products from your home, car, and work

T = Talk to your doctor about getting help to quit

For details about these steps, additional tips and an online guide to quitting smoking, go to <http://www.smokefree.gov>.

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