

The Balancing Act

Tips to Balance Your Life and Keep You Emotionally and Physically Fit



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 Canadians 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.

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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!

Anti-smoking advertising campaigns are based on the facts and although the images around lung health may seem exaggerated, they are based on the facts.

Approximately 47,000 Canadians die prematurely each year because of smoking and almost 8,000 non-smoker deaths annually are linked to second-hand smoke exposure. And smoking almost doubles your risk of ischemic stroke. Quitting smoking is a challenge, but is a lot easier when you have a plan for quitting and the support to put that plan into action and stick to it. The good news is that as soon as you quit smoking your risk of heart disease drops.

Fill Up On Fibre.

Consuming foods high in fibre 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 fruit and vegetables grown nearby and as a bonus often they contain more nutrients than ones that have taken a long journey in the back of a truck. Colourful, home-grown foods provide flavour, variety and nutrients to your meals. They are also often rich in fibre, vitamin C and beta-carotene as well as antioxidants—all of which can help reduce the build up of plaque in arteries and prevent heart disease.

Watch your waistline.

You don't need sophisticated 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 35 inches or larger in women or 40 inches or larger in 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 and 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 per cent off of your body weight can cut your risk of heart disease and stroke.

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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 ticker. Put daily stressors like traffic, lineups and deadlines into perspective and take a few deep breaths. Better still burn anxious energy off, 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 or your EAP 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 amongst women—include indigestion, nausea, back or jaw pain, lightheadedness or cold, clammy skin. If you experience these symptoms call 911 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 but 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.

*Strengthening the health
of people and organizations*

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work. health. life.