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Heart Health

Relaxation and the heart



Our hearts are responsible for pumping about five quarts of blood each minute, which is equal to about 2,000 gallons of blood each day – it is our lifeforce. We know that exercise and eating right leads to a healthier heart, but health professionals also recommend something that might surprise you. Studies reveal that relaxation techniques have a positive impact on heart health.

Relaxation techniques can help you cope with everyday stress and stress-related health problems, such as heart disease. It may seem difficult to relax under today's circumstances, but you can try a few small changes throughout your day to promote relaxation.

Laugh more often. Laughter can relieve your stress response and leave you with a good, relaxed feeling. Make it a habit to share funny jokes or stories with those around you. Hang up silly photos in your home or office for an added humor boost.

Breathe deeply. Deep breathing triggers your body's relaxation response. Try to schedule deep breathing exercises at the beginning of your day or before bedtime. Close your eyes and try to focus on filling your belly with air. Slowly release your air until your heart rate and mind are at ease.

Meditate. Meditation can wipe away the day's stress and bring inner peace. Focusing your attention takes practice, especially in a world that's filled with text messages, social media, and other distractions. Start by taking a few minutes each day to unplug and eliminate the stream of jumbled thoughts that may be crowding your mind.

Get enough sleep. Getting enough sleep at night allows your mind and body to rest so you are more equipped to handle stress, leaving you more at ease during the day. Sleep experts suggest aiming for about 7 to 9 hours of sleep.

Relaxation techniques are good for your heart, but don't forget that these practices are not replacements for preventive exams or medication. Before beginning a new activity program, talk with your primary care provider for guidance on keeping your heart healthy.

Heart Health

Heart Health Action Plan

4-Week Action Plan for Heart Health

Week 1: Get informed about heart health	This week is about learning basic information about your heart health.						
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	Commit to learning about living a heart-healthy lifestyle.	Make an appointment at the Wellness center to discuss your risk for heart disease with Dr. Trevor	Have Dr. Trevor check your blood pressure at the Wellness Center.	Inquire about your family history to see if you have a higher risk for heart disease.	Have Dr. Trevor check your cholesterol at the Wellness Center.	Learn your BMI to determine if you are at a healthy weight.	Visit Heart.org and click on the Healthy Living tab to learn about leading a heart-healthy lifestyle.*
Week 2: Eat for heart health	This week is all about making heart-healthy food choices.						
	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
	Create a heart-healthy meal plan for the week.	Make better drink choices. Choose water over other sugary beverages.	Add herbs to food for flavor instead of adding salt.	Make sure that half your plate is fruits and vegetables.	Check your portion and serving sizes to ensure you are eating the appropriate amount.	Swap your unhealthy snacks with fruits and vegetables.	Visit HeartCheck.org to learn more about choosing heart-healthy foods.*
Week 3: Lower your risk	This week is about taking action to lower your risk.						
	Day 15	Day 16	Day 17	Day 18	Day 19	Day 20	Day 21
	Get 7-8 hours of sleep each night.	Walk whenever possible. Take the stairs instead of the elevator and park far away from the door.	Aim for 150 minutes of physical activity a week.	Start a health journal to help you stay on track with your diet and exercise.	Try meditation or yoga to help reduce your daily stress.	Assess your mental health and contact Dr. Trevor at the Wellness center if you feel like you need support.	Take a few hours to do something that makes you happy.
Week 4: Take the next steps	This week is about taking control of your heart health.						
	Day 22	Day 23	Day 24	Day 25	Day 26	Day 27	Day 28
	Do you smoke? If yes, talk to Dr. Trevor at the Wellness Center about a plan to help you quit.	Track your heart health numbers using a wallet card or notebook.	Try to include muscle- and bone-strengthening activities 3 days a week.	Set goals for losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight.	Reduce your alcohol consumption.	Establish a supportive social network with your friends and family.	Take time to celebrate what you have accomplished these last few weeks.

*or call the Wellness Center at 312.421.1016 to have this information mailed to you

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Source: Heart.org, NIH.gov

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