



DISCOVER HEART HEALTHY IDEAS WITH SMART HEALTH INSIGHTS

It's American Heart Month, a time when everyone can focus on their cardiovascular health. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States and the disease accounts for 1 in 4 deaths annually. This issue of SMART Health Insights brings you simple things you can do to take an active role in reducing your risk and staying heart healthy.

Marpai (Mar-pay), your employer health plan services provider, delivers SMART Health Insights every month to help you feel great and live well through better health. With tips for better physical and mental wellness, highlights of exciting new health technology products and news from Marpai, it's designed to help improve your health journey.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 28 Ways and 28 Days to a Healthier Heart
- Surprising Body Cues That Could Be a Heart Concern
- How to Shake the Salt Habit
- Thankfulness: How Gratitude Can Help Your Health
- Could a Fitness Tracker Boost Your Heart Health?
- The SMART Way to Manage Your Health Plan

28 WAYS AND 28 DAYS TO A HEALTHIER HEART

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<https://www.roseman.edu/2019/02/06/heart-health-american-heart-month/>

February 1st marked the beginning of American Heart Month. The 28-Day celebration and public campaign seeks to raise awareness about and provide strategies for preventing heart disease while encouraging people to live heart healthy lives. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States and the disease accounts for 1 in 4 deaths annually¹. Key risks factors include smoking, high Body Mass Index (BMI) ≥ 30 , high blood pressure, high cholesterol, physical inactivity and diabetes.

Despite these sobering statistics, 80% of cardiac events can be prevented through education and lifestyle changes and there are simple changes that can be made to help reduce the risk of heart disease. The American Heart Association suggests you can have a healthier heart by accepting their challenge of *28 Days to a Healthy Heart*.

1. Squat it out. Do 1 minute of squats.
2. Make a heart healthy snack and watch your favorite movie.
3. Try a friend's favorite physical activity.
4. Schedule your annual physical.
5. Visit Smokefree.gov to take the first step in quitting smoking.
6. Make today a salt-free day. Use herbs for flavor instead of salt.
7. Park further away or get off the bus a stop early.
8. Keep up the great work! Walk an extra 15 minutes today.
9. Plan your menu for the week with heart healthy recipes.
10. Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity today.
11. Calculate your body mass index (BMI).
12. Share your favorite inspirational quote with The Heart Truth®.
13. Give the elevator a day off and take the stairs.
14. Protect your sweetheart's heart: Plan a heart healthy date.
15. Dance, Dance, Dance! Dance to your favorite song.
16. Stress less. Practice mindful meditation for 10 minutes.
17. Make a heart healthy meal.
18. Add a stretch break to your calendar to increase your flexibility.
19. Swap the sweets for a piece of fruit for dessert.
20. Share a funny video or joke that makes you laugh.
21. Head to bed with enough time to get a full 8 hours of sleep.
22. Call three relatives and ask about your family health history.
23. Ask a friend to join you in your favorite exercise.
24. Take out a tape measure and find out the size of your waist.
25. March in place for 3 minutes to get your heart going.
26. Make half of your lunch and dinner plates vegetables.
27. See how many push-ups you can do in one minute.
28. Pay it forward and tell a friend about The Heart Truth.



SURPRISING BODY CUES THAT COULD BE A HEART CONCERN

Published by Johns Hopkins Medicine

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/surprising-body-cues-that-could-be-a-heart-concern>

The classic signs of heart trouble—chest tightness, pressure or pain—are far from its only signals. People often fail to connect other symptoms they're experiencing to their actual cause: the heart. This can result in failing to get the help they need for an emergency heart issue, like heart attack or stroke, or a critical delay in getting possible heart disease diagnosed and treated.

"Most people know their bodies better than any doctor does. In general, if you constantly feel something isn't 'right' or isn't what you're used to, that warrants medical attention," says Parag Joshi, M.D., a cardiology fellow with the Johns Hopkins Ciccarone Center for the Prevention of Heart Disease.

Your whole body can be involved in sending the message that something's wrong with your heart.

Q&A: WHAT SIGNS OF HEART DISEASE CAN A TEST DETECT?

Testing can reveal markers for heart disease that have no visible symptoms, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. A coronary calcium scan provides a picture of buildup in the arteries. All these tests can help identify high-risk individuals who can be treated appropriately before they have a serious event, says Johns Hopkins expert Parag Joshi, M.D.

Johns Hopkins research has found that an ultrafast CT scanner can accurately sort out which people with chest pain need an invasive procedure, such as bypass surgery, to restore blood flow to the heart.

DIRECT (BUT SURPRISING) SIGNS OF HEART PROBLEMS

Many heart-related body cues are closely linked to inadequate blood flow through the arteries to the heart. But signs like these may not seem obviously connected to the heart.

Jaw and neck pain. Chest pain doesn't always center on the heart. It's of concern when it radiates to the jaw and neck from the chest.

Nausea and bloating. Women in particular often describe this kind of discomfort, which can include vomiting, before they feel chest pain.

Overall fatigue. When your heart can't pump effectively, less blood flows to your lungs and your muscles. Shortness of breath and fatigue when doing everyday activities, such as climbing stairs or walking across a parking lot, is a red flag.

LESS DIRECT SIGNS OF HEART PROBLEMS

Some problems may or may not have clear links to heart disease but are worth a heart checkup, especially if you have other risk factors for heart disease.

Sleep apnea. This temporary collapse of an airway puts a halt to breathing during sleep and has been linked to high blood pressure and an increased risk of heart attack.

Trouble achieving or maintaining an erection. Though men often don't connect bedroom problems to the heart, erectile dysfunction can be a very early sign of the arterial damage of heart disease. "A problem with your blood vessels in one area of the body is associated with blood vessel problems in another area," says Joshi.

Cramping, aching or numbness in the calves when you walk. This kind of leg pain, which is felt when you exercise and stops when you stop, can be a sign of peripheral vascular disease (PVD), a circulation disorder. People with PVD often have atherosclerosis, the buildup of damaging plaque in the arteries.

DEFINITIONS

Arteries (are-te-rease): The blood vessels that carry oxygen-rich blood away from your heart for delivery to every part of your body. Arteries look like thin tubes or hoses. The walls are made of a tough outer layer, a middle layer of muscle and a smooth inner wall that helps blood flow easily. The muscle layer expands and contracts to help blood move.

Blood vessels (veh-suls): The system of flexible tubes—arteries, capillaries and veins—that carries blood through the body. Oxygen and nutrients are delivered by arteries to tiny, thin-walled capillaries that feed them to cells and pick up waste material, including carbon dioxide. Capillaries pass the waste to veins, which take the blood back to the heart and lungs, where carbon dioxide is let out through your breath as you exhale.

Risk factor: Anything that boosts your chances of getting a disease. For example, smoking is a risk factor for cancer, and obesity is a risk factor for diabetes.

Sleep apnea (ap-ne-ah): A disorder in which your breathing repeatedly stops or becomes very shallow as you sleep. Your breathing may pause anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes. This ongoing condition disrupts your sleep, making you tired during the day and increasing your risk for heart problems, diabetes, obesity and driving or work-related accidents.

HOW TO SHAKE THE SALT HABIT

Published by CardioSmart American College of Cardiology | <https://www.cardiosmart.org/topics/healthy-living/eat-better/how-to-shake-the-salt-habit>

Your body needs a certain amount of sodium. Sodium helps your body maintain normal nerve and muscle function as well as fluid balance. But too much sodium, mostly consumed as salt, can spell trouble for your heart and health by placing added strain on your heart, blood vessels and kidneys as your body tries to get rid of any excess sodium.

Consuming high levels of sodium has been linked to high blood pressure.

When you have high blood pressure, you're also more likely to have a heart attack or stroke, or develop kidney disease.

Most Americans eat too much salt. On average, they take in about 3,440 mg per day. That is nearly 50% more than the recommended limit. But lowering your sodium intake is good for your heart.

The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend the average adult consume no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium—or about one teaspoon—over the course of a day. An even lower daily limit of 1,500 milligrams a day is suggested for people who:

- Have high blood pressure, diabetes or kidney disease.
- Are 50 or older.
- Are African American; this population has higher rates of high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

Alternatively, aiming to at least lower your sodium intake by at least 1,000 mg also can help.

The good news is that you can take steps to keep tabs on and limit how much sodium you are eating.

SODIUM AND SALT. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

We often use salt and sodium as if they mean the same thing. But they aren't quite the same. Sodium exists in many forms.

It's naturally found in many foods, and it's also added to processed foods during manufacturing. Salt forms when sodium is combined with chloride. Sodium and chloride together create the crystal-type substance that fills our saltshakers and those in restaurant kitchens.

However, most of the sodium in your diet is in prepared food, especially if foods are packaged or processed. The sodium is added during cooking before you even purchase it.

"Losing or hiding the salt shaker is relatively a minor step. It's the food, not the salt shaker." —Keith Ferdinand, MD, FACC

TOP SOURCES OF SODIUM

Breads and rolls

- Pizza
- Processed meats such as deli meats, hot dogs and bacon
- Soups
- Snack foods including crackers, pretzels and chips
- Cheese
- Chicken—believe it or not, chicken is one of the highest sources of salt!



Surprising Sources

- Sodas
- Pasta sauces, bottled salad dressings, ketchup and other condiments
- Meat dishes such as beef stew, chili, and meatloaf
- Frozen dinners

View the full list from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Top Sources of Sodium](#)

9 WAYS TO CUT SALT

1. Choose foods wisely.
2. Be label savvy.
3. Be mindful of salt in prepared and restaurant foods.
4. Pick healthy snacks.
5. Watch out for canned foods.
6. Spice up your recipes.
7. Think twice before adding a dash of salt.
8. Ask your providers about salt substitutes.
9. Get advice from a nutritionist

If you need help meal planning and learning more about how to cut down on sodium, consider seeing a nutritionist or dietitian. The DASH diet is also a popular eating plan to help curb salt.

THANKFULNESS: HOW GRATITUDE CAN HELP YOUR HEALTH

Published by The American Heart Association

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/mental-health-and-wellbeing/thankfulness-how-gratitude-can-help-your-health>

Gratitude is more than a buzzword. It's a habit and practice that may actually change your perception of well-being.

Are you feeling overwhelmed by the coronavirus pandemic, all the changes it has brought to your life and everything you need to worry about to stay safe?

Or do you sometimes feel like you just can't catch a break? You know — the truck that cut you off, the weird feedback you got from your boss, the grocery item you need but is never on the store shelf? Do you sometimes feel negative and cynical?

Sure, we all do this a little, but doing it a lot can lead to depression¹, which is linked to poor heart health, more inflammation and even a weaker immune system.² Yikes!

Some neuroscience experts think our brains focus on negative information as a way to remember pain so we can avoid it in the future. They call this the "negativity bias."³

To balance out this natural tendency, we can practice gratitude.

"Gratitude is good medicine," says Robert A. Emmons, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis and author of *The Little Book of Gratitude*.

"Clinical trials indicate that the practice of gratitude can have dramatic and lasting effects in a person's life. It can lower blood pressure and improve immune function. ... Grateful people engage in more exercise, have better dietary behaviors, are less likely to smoke and abuse alcohol and have higher rates of medication adherence."⁴

Dang, being grateful is the gift that seriously keeps on giving, right? Who couldn't use all these benefits right now?



HERE'S A SIMPLE WAY TO GET STARTED:

Write these down before you go to bed or share them around the dinner table. In five minutes, you can practice gratitude from the heart.

1. Health: What did your body do for you today? Did you know you take about 8 million breaths a year? Your feet can take you up a mountain; your arms can hold someone you love. Take a minute to marvel at the finely tuned machinery of your body, and thank yourself for the steps you take every day to keep it safe and healthy.

2. Eat: What did you feed your body to nourish yourself today? Was it an old favorite, something you made or something new and different? If you eat three meals a day, you'll eat about a thousand meals this year! Take a minute to savor an especially yummy meal. And check out some healthy options on the AHA's recipe hub.

3. Activity: What did you do that you really enjoyed today? Did you give it your all when exercising today, or find a quiet moment while sitting in traffic to reflect? Take a minute to think back on one particularly awesome moment.

4. Relationship: Whom do you look forward to connecting with? Is it someone who sets your heart on fire, always has a smile for you, has your back or makes you laugh until you cry? Take a minute to smile as you think about this special person. Then make plans for a virtual meet-up.

5. Time: What are you doing right now? Every single day you wake up with 24 brand new hours. The past is history, the future is a mystery and today is a gift. That's why they call it the present! Take a minute to be thankful for the gift of time, including any extra time you have right now for your family or yourself.

Let's do this, and be Healthy for Good!

1 Journal of Cognition and Emotion, Negative processing biases predict subsequent depressive symptoms. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02699930143000554>

2 National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, Chronic Illness & Mental Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/chronic-illness-mental-health/index.shtml>

3 National Institutes of Health, National Library of Medicine, Not all emotions are created equal: The negativity bias in social-emotional development <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3652533/> and Agency Attribution in Infancy: Evidence for a Negativity Bias <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4011708/>

4 American Heart Association News, Gratitude is a healthy attitude.

COULD A FITNESS TRACKER BOOST YOUR HEART HEALTH?

Published by Johns Hopkins Medicine

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/could-a-fitness-tracker-boost-your-heart-health>

You know exercise is heart smart and good for you. But do you really know how much physical activity you're getting? And how can you get more, day in and day out, for your heart health? A fitness tracker may help.

Studies show that consistently using a fitness tracker—a device that tracks your movement, such as a traditional pedometer or other wearable device, or a smartphone app—can increase your steps per day by more than a mile, especially if you establish a heart-smart daily goal.

"Fitness trackers are a great tool for heart health," says Johns Hopkins cardiologist Seth Martin, M.D., M.H.S. "Being more active and changing your habits is important, but it can be difficult. Tracking likely helps a lot of people when combined with a clear goal to shoot for."

THE HEART-SMART POWER OF A FITNESS TRACKER

Having an objective daily record can open people's eyes to how little exercise they're getting, Martin says, which can recalibrate their mindset and become an incentive. People find ways to incorporate more activity into their day, whether it's dedicated walking or gym time, walking during meetings or personal calls, or simply taking the stairs instead of an elevator.

"It gives people information and empowers them to start making changes for heart health," Martin says. "And often, their activity level was not something they were paying attention to before they started tracking."

FITNESS TRACKERS: WHERE TO START, HOW TO STICK WITH IT

Try a few pedometers, smartphone tracking apps or wearable devices, until you find one that's comfortable for you and your budget, Martin suggests. Next steps once you've made a match:

1. **Use the tracker consistently**, every day.
2. **Set a goal**. The most common figure is 10,000 steps per day, but check with your doctor. If that is unrealistic or unhealthy, he or she can suggest an individualized plan, such as doubling your 2,000 steps to 4,000.
3. **Find activities** you enjoy that also fit into your daily life and can be sustained over the long-term.
4. **Recruit friends and family** to use trackers as well. It can create a social support network and even foster a sense of competition.
5. **Be accountable**. Check your numbers every day, and share them with your doctor at your next appointment.
6. **Follow those five tips**, and you'll be on your way to a healthier lifestyle—and a healthier heart.



THE FUTURE OF FITNESS TRACKERS

Be ready, too, as doctors learn and introduce even better ways to use these devices. In a recent study, Martin and his Johns Hopkins colleagues tested an automated, real-time, personalized program that sent text messages to subjects based on data from their phone. Over the short term, this coaching system helped increase step counts by more than a mile a day.

Martin hopes to see a similar system become widely used. He also wants to test social media platforms, to build support and competition networks. "It hasn't been studied, but we think it will work," Martin says. "I think technology can be a very powerful tool to get people moving more."

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