

Health Awareness

Ten Steps To A Healthier Heart—And A Healthier You

(NAPSA)—Keeping your heart in good shape may be simpler than many people realize. That's good news, since a healthy heart can be the root of a healthier you.

Here are a few hints that may help your heart health. Remember, talk to your doctor about adopting even simple changes that can affect your lifestyle:

- Take a daily aspirin if you are a man over 40 or a woman over 50 and do not have a history of gastrointestinal bleeding, reflux esophagitis or increased bleeding. Aspirin is an inexpensive medication that decreases the risk of heart attacks in men and strokes in women.

- Walk a minimum of 30 minutes every day. Exercise helps preserve cardiac health, maintains a lower body weight, prevents osteoporosis and prevents muscle loss.

- Weigh yourself weekly and keep track of the results. "No one gains 50 pounds in one week—it happens slowly over a lifetime," says Dr. Paul D. Thompson, director of Cardiology at Hartford Hospital, an award-winning medical center in Connecticut. "If you see your weight go up even a few pounds, lose it. It's easier to lose one pound 50 times than 50 pounds once."

- Make sure you know not only your total cholesterol level, but also your cholesterol breakdown into the "good" and "bad"



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components. A low level of "good" cholesterol may be a greater risk factor for heart attacks than a high level of "bad" cholesterol.

- Get your blood pressure measured at least twice a year. High blood pressure is a silent killer and can lead to strokes and heart failure, warns Thompson.

- If you need cholesterol or blood pressure medications, take them faithfully. They can't reduce your risk of a heart attack if they remain in the bottle or are waiting for you at the pharmacy.

- If you smoke, quit. Smoking causes significant damage to your heart and arteries, and puts you at increased risk for other health issues such as cancer.

- See your doctor promptly if you develop new symptoms of heartburn or indigestion, especially if they arise with exertion and go away with rest. "In many patients, the first sign of a heart problem can feel like indigestion or a stomach issue. Nerves to the stomach and heart overlap, so heart symptoms can be mistaken as coming from the stomach," explains Thompson.

- If you think you are having a heart attack, don't take any chances. Don't drive yourself to the hospital—many people experience sudden death from a heart attack while trying to drive. The best advice is to call 911, stay put and chew a regular aspirin tablet. Aspirin can open a blocked heart artery and stop a heart attack before it causes too much damage.

- Be happy. Says Thompson, "The happiest, most optimistic people not only appear to live longer, but also lead healthier lives. There is even evidence that you can 'train' happy nerve pathways in your brain just like you can train yourself to catch a baseball. So practice being happy. It just might grow on you, or really...in you."

Keeping these tips in mind may help yourself to a longer, better life. More good health advice and information on health care programs are available at www.hartfordhospital.org.