

HealthAdvocate@yourservice

# Healthy Habits

Tips and resources for living well



## This Month: Protect Your Heart

**Reduce your risk of disease.** The heart is one of the most important organs in the body. Its function is to continuously pump blood throughout the body, sending un-oxygenated blood to our lungs and oxygenated blood to the rest of the body. Having a healthy heart is central to keeping our bodies healthy overall. In this issue, you will learn how to reduce your risk of heart disease, create a balanced workout, adopt a heart-healthy diet, and manage stress.

### Factors for heart disease

Learn how to reduce your risk

Although there are a few heart disease risk factors—like your age, gender, or family history—you cannot control, many of the risk factors for heart disease that you can change are best detected through health screenings and wellness exams. These include:

- Having a blood pressure consistently above 140/90
- Cholesterol over 200mg/dl
- Having an HDL (“good” cholesterol) that is below 40mg/dl for men and below 50mg/dl for women, an elevated LDL (“bad” cholesterol), or triglycerides over 150mg/dl
- Using tobacco
- Being overweight or obese
- Being inactive

You can reduce your risk by engaging in healthy lifestyle behaviors such as eating nutritiously, incorporating exercise into your daily routine, quitting tobacco, and managing stress.

### Try this heart-healthy dinner: Chicken Taco Salad

This scrumptious salad combines protein, veggies, grains, and heart-healthy fats and fiber.

#### Ingredients:

- 1 – 2 cups of romaine lettuce
- ½ cup cooked, unsalted black beans
- ½ cup green bell peppers
- ½ cup cooked brown rice
- ¼ of an avocado
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons Pico de Gallo
- 6 ounces chicken breast
- ½ of a lemon

#### Directions:

1. Slice chicken breast into strips. Place in oven and broil for about 10 minutes, rotating continuously, or until fully cooked.
2. Slice lettuce, bell pepper and avocado; place in a bowl.
3. Add ½ cup of cooked brown rice, cooked chicken and beans to the salad.
4. Top with Pico de Gallo, two tablespoons of olive oil, and a squeeze of lemon.





## Heart-smart choices

### Tips for healthy diet

When trying to improve your heart and your general health, be strategic about the foods you eat. These tips can help you make smarter food choices.

- **Eat whole, unprocessed foods.** Whenever possible, eat foods made of one ingredient, or that do not come pre-processed, like vegetables, fruits, lean meat (such as chicken breast), eggs, nuts, and seeds.
- **Avoid excessive sugar.** Avoid foods that have added sugar or sugar listed as one of the first three ingredients.
- **Go lower-salt.** Reduce your daily sodium intake to no more than 2,400 mg by not adding salt and avoiding canned and processed foods.
- **Increase potassium.** Up your intake of potassium-rich foods such as beans, dark leafy greens, unprocessed potatoes, sweet potatoes, bananas and citrus fruit.
- **Eat fiber.** Fiber helps you feel full, improves digestion, and helps with weight management. Depending on your age and gender, optimal intake is 21-38 grams per day. Choose fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grain breads and cereals instead of refined, processed products.

Remember, always talk to your doctor before changing your diet, especially if you have a heart condition.

## Stress management strategies

### Serenity starts now

Chronic stress is linked to heart disease. Thus, finding ways to effectively manage stress will help you reduce your risk. If you feel stressed often, mention it to your doctor so that you can find effective coping strategies. Try these simple techniques “in the moment,” when something is stressing you out:

- **Breathe slowly:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 5 seconds, and then exhale for 6 seconds. Slowing your breathing helps send a signal to the brain to shift into a calmer state.
- **Take a break:** Get your mind off the stressor by distracting yourself with something you enjoy, like doing a Sudoku puzzle, listening to your favorite song, or chatting with a friend.
- **Meditation:** Studies show that daily meditation (even if only for a few moments a day) can rewire the brain and decrease stress and anxiety over time.

## Balance your workouts!

### Include these activities

Engaging in regular exercise is beneficial for optimal heart health. A balanced workout allows you to improve your heart and body while decreasing risk for injury and discomfort. Even moderate activity is beneficial. Try to incorporate the following into your routine:

- Cardiovascular activities, such as aerobics, swimming, walking, running, hiking, cycling. These condition the heart and lungs, decrease total cholesterol, and increase the “good” (HDL) cholesterol.
- Strength training, May include weights, resistance bands or just using your own body to increase and maintain strength, balance and bone density.
- Intense interval training, such as jogging or sprinting for 30 seconds and then walking for 30 seconds, repeated several times. Interval training can help those with limited time to exercise achieve fitness results.

Remember to talk to your doctor before beginning any new fitness regimen.

## QUIZ: How much do you know about heart health?

1. **True or false: When trying to improve your heart health, all you need to worry about is reducing your salt intake.**
  - a. True
  - b. False
2. **True or false: Foods high in fiber are beneficial for heart health.**
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. **True or false: If you want to reduce your stress, you need to meditate for at least an hour per day.**
  - a. True
  - b. False

Answers: 1 b, 2 a, 3 b