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2016-2017

HEALTHY HABITS TO BEAT STRESS

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Healthy Habits to combat stress



Stress has an immediate and potentially long-term effect on the human body. Though it's a natural response to both good and bad experiences, stress, when chronic, can produce a host of negative consequences that greatly diminish one's quality of life.

Combating stress can sometimes be difficult, as the causes of stress are never too far away for many adults. In its 2015 "Stress in America™: Paying With Our Health" survey, the American Psychological Association found that money is the top cause of stress for Americans. The survey was conducted on behalf of the APA by Harris Poll, which asked more than 3,000 participants about their issues with stress. Sixty-four percent said money was a somewhat or very significant source of stress, and that number was even higher for parents (77 percent). Survey respondents also noted that work is a significant source of stress.

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Few adults can imagine a life that does not include financial- or work-related stress. But there are ways to combat stress that can benefit people's long-term health and improve their present-day quality of life.

- Develop a support network. Speaking about problems with trusted friends and family members can be an effective way to combat stress. The APA study found that participants who reported having an emotional support network reported lower stress levels than those who had no such networks to rely on. Try to overcome any reticence you might have about speaking about your stress to a close friend or trusted relative on

those days when stress seems overwhelming.

- Get more exercise. Routine exercise is another healthy way to combat stress. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, studies have shown that exercise can reduce fatigue, improve alertness and concentration and enhance overall cognitive function. Those are considerable benefits to people dealing with elevated levels of stress, which can contribute to both physical and mental fatigue and negatively impact one's ability to concentrate. Studies also have shown that regular exercise can decrease tension, which tends to increase as stress levels rise, and elevate and help to stabilize mood, which often decreases as stress levels increase.

- Don't lean on alcohol after stressful days. Many people respond to stressful days by consuming alcohol. While alcohol helps some

people forget a stressful day, it also produces psychological and physiological side effects that can compound the effects of the very stress drinkers are looking to relieve. People who drink to alleviate stress may only be doing more harm with each drink, so find a way to cope with stress that has a more positive impact on both your body and mind than that produced by alcohol.

- Breathe deeply. The American Institute of Stress notes that focused breathing is a relaxation response that stimulates the nervous system and promotes a sense of calmness. Deep breathing can combat stress, lower blood pressure and draw your attention away from those things that are causing your stress. Visit www.stress.org to learn about deep breathing exercises.

Stress is a fact of life for many people. But while stress may be inevitable, it can be overcome.

Explore natural sleep remedies

Sleep is a natural process designed to recharge the body and mind. Although some people find no difficulty in settling down for the night, many others profess to have periodic or chronic sleep problems. But before asking doctors to reach for their prescription pads, men and women struggling to fall asleep at night may want to consider some all-natural remedies to help them get a good night's rest.

Delta Sleep Labs says between 20 and 40 percent of all adults have insomnia in the course of any year, and more than 70 million Americans suffer from sleep disorders and wakefulness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognize insufficient sleep as a public health epidemic that can result in difficulty performing daily tasks, hypertension, depression, and even obesity.

While sleeping pills can be effective, they pose the risk of dependence and also may carry with them dangerous side effects. Some individuals have driven or engaged in other potentially dangerous activities while under the influence of sleeping pills. No such side effects have been associated with natural remedies.

When lifestyle changes, such as limiting caffeine intake or creating a sleep hygiene program, fail to produce the desired results, the following natural remedies, when used as directed, may help men and women get a better night's rest.

- **Meditation:**
- **Distraction:** Although there are conflicting reports as to whether reading or watching television before going to bed can be a help or a hindrance, some people with insomnia do find these actions can help

induce sleep. Choose a book or a program that isn't stimulating to distract yourself from anything that is causing distress. Doing so can create a state of relaxation that makes it easier to fall asleep. Use the sleep timer on the television to automatically turn off the TV after a set number of minutes, so you are not woken from sleep by a loud show after drifting off.

- **Aromatherapy:** Calming scents can relax the body. Preliminary research suggests that lavender essential oil may lengthen total sleep time, increase deep sleep and help people feel refreshed in the morning, particularly for women who have a more acute sense of smell than men. Put a few drops of lavender on a pillow before retiring to bed, or take a relaxing bath with the oil mixed into the bath water.

- **Magnesium:** Magnesium is a natural sedative. Foods rich in magnesium include dark green, leafy vegetables, almonds, whole grains, and legumes. Magnesium supplements also are available, and these are usually taken in a specific ratio with calcium to be the most effective.

- **Valerian:** Valerian is a natural herbal remedy that grows in the form of a tall, flowering grassland plant. The roots are ground to produce the supplement that could assist with sleep. The Mayo Clinic notes that several small studies indicate that valerian may reduce the amount of time it takes to fall asleep and help you

sleep better. Other studies have shown valerian to be no more effective than a placebo. However, with relatively few side effects, valerian may be worth a try.

- **Lemon balm:**
- **Acupuncture:** A study from researchers at the University of Pittsburgh concluded that acupuncture may be an effective treatment for insomnia. The study found that five weeks of acupuncture increased melatonin secretion in the evening and improved total sleep time.

- **Melatonin supplements:** A naturally occurring hormone that regulates your sleep-wake cycle in the brain, melatonin is produced when darkness falls. According to a Journal of Sleep Research study, time-release melatonin supplementation was effective in reducing sleep latency and improving sleep quality. Lower doses of melatonin have been shown to be as effective as higher doses, so less is often more with melatonin.

Insomnia can often be traced to anxiety and an overactive mind. However, it also may be a side effect of medication or a symptom of a larger condition. Speak with a doctor if insomnia becomes chronic or problematic.





HOW TO MAINTAIN WORKOUT ROUTINES DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Between decking the halls, visiting family and attending holiday parties, it may seem like there is little time to maintain a workout routine during the holiday season. While the holiday season is an especially busy time of year, men and women who plan and stay dedicated to their routines do not need to let their health fall by the wayside until January.

Several studies show that people can gain anywhere from one pound to a few pounds between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Although that might not seem like a lot of weight, a report in *The New England Journal of Medicine* noted that many people never lose the weight they put on during the holidays.

Those who struggle to keep the weight off understand the importance of maintaining both a consistent fitness schedule and healthy eating habits. This may be challenging when the rich foods and parties synonymous with the holiday season are around to threaten healthy habits. Here's how to stay on course.

- Establish a regular exercise date. Treat exercise as any other obligation on the calendar. Make it a necessity and not a luxury. Schedule time for workouts, even if it means removing something else from your agenda.

- Don't worry about the length of your workouts. If you're accustomed to an hourlong workout but cannot fit in more than 20 minutes on some days, don't skip

the workout simply because it's shorter. Make the most of that time by targeting larger, core muscles.

- Change your schedule. You may need to alter your daily schedule to fit in gym workouts or other exercise. Try getting up earlier and heading out prior to work or school. This will open up time throughout the rest of your day, and you can use that time to meet the demands of the holiday season.

- Get a trainer or a workout buddy. It's far easier to blow off a workout when you go it alone. However, if you have a workout partner who is counting on you and vice versa, you may be less inclined to miss a workout — even when you're not especially motivated to hit the gym.

- Try new activities. Workouts need not be limited to exercises in the gym. Plenty of activities work the body and burn calories. Sledding, ice skating, skiing, and snowboarding are just a few winter sports that can help you stay in shape.

- Choose a hotel with a pool or gym. If holiday travel is on your itinerary, select a hotel that has fitness equipment. This way you can keep up with your routine. Even swimming a few laps in an indoor pool can provide a cardiovascular workout while you're on vacation. Remember, it only takes a two-week break from exercise to experience a fitness regression, and you will only

have to work harder to get back to your current fitness level if you let exercise slide too long.

- Add short, high-intensity exercises. Burn more calories in less time with high-intensity workouts. This way you won't need to schedule as much time for workouts but will still get the benefit of exercise.

- Transform chores into exercise opportunities. See that vacuum cleaner, rake or broom as a piece of exercise equipment. While cleaning up for holiday company, turn on the radio and get your heart pumping, too. Do leg raises while you're preparing meals or do some pushups off of the kitchen counter.

- Use your bodyweight. Even if you can't make it to the gym, rely on your own body resistance for a thorough workout. Pushups, squats, burpees, mountain climbers, jumping rope, and lunges are some exercises that rely on bodyweight for effectiveness.

- Periodically exercise during the day. If you have a few free moments here and there during the day, use these opportunities to exercise. By the end of the day, you may find you squeezed in an entire workout's worth of exercise over the course of several 10-minute intervals.

Exercise and fitness do not have to play second fiddle to other holiday activities. Make time for workouts, and you will be ahead of the game come the new year.

Prevent colds and flu before they start

Though the holiday season is a joyous time of year, it's also one when many people succumb to cold and flu. Spending so much time indoors in close proximity to others can increase a person's susceptibility to flu and cold, so it's no surprise that the holiday season, when many people spend lots of time celebrating indoors with family and friends, marks the unofficial start to cold and flu season.

Despite what Mom might have told you about going out into the cold with a wet head or leaving home without wearing a coat, such actions do not increase your risk for cold and flu. But being cooped up indoors, where germs from others who are sick can fester, can increase that risk.

Cold weather also can be a factor, but not for the reason you think. According to a 2007 study from researchers at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, the influenza virus is more stable and can stay in the air longer when the air is cold and dry. Dr. Peter Palese, a flu researcher who is professor and chairman of the school's microbiology department, examined guinea pigs infected with the flu virus to determine the connection between the flu and cold weather. Dr. Palese varied the air temperature and humidity in the guinea pigs' environment and determined that flu transmission was best at 41 degrees, while the prevalence of transmission declined as the temperature rose. By the time temperatures reached 86 degrees, the virus was not transmitted at all. Low humidity also helped transmit the virus, and high humidity stopped the spread. Flu viruses spread through the air in water droplets expelled from sick individuals' noses and mouths. High humidity may cause these droplets to fall to the ground before they can infect someone else.

Colds are largely transmitted through surface contact with the virus or direct contact

with a sick individual. The cold virus is then contracted on the hands and typically transferred to the nose, eyes or mouth through inadvertent touching of these areas. Spending time indoors in close quarters with other people, which is more common in the winter, can facilitate the spread of colds as well as the flu virus.

There are many ways to reduce your risk of contracting a cold or the flu virus this winter. Perhaps no preventive measure is more effective than getting a flu shot. In addition, wash your hands frequently to prevent the spread of germs, and disinfect remote controls, computer keyboards, tablets, mobile phones, and other items that are handled by multiple people on any given day. In addition, spend as much time outdoors as possible so you can escape potentially contaminated indoor air.

If you come down with the flu, increase the humidity in your home by running the shower with the door open, using a recreational aquarium or boiling pots of water. Maintain a warm indoor temperature to reduce the likelihood that the flu virus will spread.

Other ways to reduce your risk for cold and flu include:

- maintaining a healthy diet
- getting several minutes of sunlight per day
- exercising regularly.



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Why dental hygiene is essential for overall health

The importance of maintaining clean teeth and healthy gums goes beyond having fresh breath and a white smile. Many people are surprised to discover that oral hygiene plays an integral role in overall health.

Research indicates that oral health mirrors the condition of the body as a whole. Also, regular dental visits can alert dentists about overall health and pinpoint if a person is at a risk for chronic disease. An oral health check-up also may be the first indication of a potential health issue not yet evident to a general medical doctor.

HEART DISEASE

According to the Academy of General Dentistry, there is a distinct relationship between periodontal disease and conditions such as heart disease and stroke. Joint teams at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom and the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, Ireland, found that people with

bleeding gums from poor dental hygiene could have an increased risk of heart disease. Bacteria from the mouth is able to enter the bloodstream when bleeding gums are present. That bacteria can stick to platelets and subsequently form blood clots. This interrupts the flow of blood to the heart and may trigger a heart attack. Brushing and flossing twice daily and rinsing with mouthwash can remove bacteria and keep gums healthy.

FACIAL PAIN

The Office of the Surgeon General says infections of the gums that support the teeth can lead to facial and oral pain. Gingivitis, which is an early stage of gum disease, as well as advanced gum disease, affects more than 75 percent of the American population.

Dental decay can lead to its own share of pain. Maintaining a healthy

mouth can fend off decay and infections, thereby preventing pain.

PANCREATIC CANCER

In 2007, the Harvard School of Public Health reported a link between gum disease and pancreatic cancer. In the ongoing study, 51,000 men were followed and data was collected beginning in 1986. The Harvard researchers found that men with a history of gum disease had a 64 percent increased risk of pancreatic cancer compared with men who had never had gum disease. The greatest risk for pancreatic cancer among this group was in men with recent tooth loss. However, the study was unable to find links between other types of oral health problems, such as tooth decay, and pancreatic cancer.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Various health ailments, including poor oral health, have been linked to a

greater risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. In 2010, after reviewing 20 years' worth of data, researchers from New York University concluded that there is a link between gum inflammation and Alzheimer's disease. Follow-up studies from researchers at the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom compared brain samples from 10 living patients with Alzheimer's to samples from 10 people who did not have the disease. Data indicated that a bacterium — *Porphyromonas gingivalis* — was present in the Alzheimer's brain samples but not in the samples from the brains of people who did not have Alzheimer's. *P. gingivalis* is usually associated with chronic gum disease. As a result of the study, experts think that the bacteria can move via nerves in the roots of teeth that connect directly with the brain or through bleeding gums.

These health conditions are just a sampling of the relationship between oral health and overall health. Additional connections also have been made and continue to be studied.



How to improve indoor air quality in your home

With winter on the horizon, homeowners who live in locales with harsh winters are preparing their homes for a season spent largely indoors. Unlike the other seasons of the year, when homeowners can comfortably air out their homes by opening windows, winter offers no such opportunities to let nature improve indoor air quality.

Such a reality can make a home uncomfortable as winter drags on. But that discomfort pales in comparison to the health risks presented by poor indoor air quality. Radon, volatile chemicals from fragrances used in conventional cleaners and lead from house dust are just a few of the many sources of indoor air pollution commonly found in homes, and these pollutants can be especially harmful in winter, when many people spend more time indoors thanks to harsh weather. But while you might not be able to change the weather so you can open windows in the wintertime, you can take steps to improve indoor air quality in your home.

- Clean the floors regularly. Dirty floors take their toll on a home's indoor air quality. Dust that's allowed to settle on floors may contain harmful chemicals and allergens that can lead to respiratory problems and additional uncomfortable health conditions. Clean your floors at least once per week during the winter months, ideally with a vacuum that's equipped with a HEPA filter. The HEPA filter is important because it can prevent dust and dirt from being blown back out of the vacuum in the exhaust. After you have vacuumed, mop the floors as well, as even the most effective vacuums leave potentially harmful dust particles behind. A once-over with a mop and some hot water can remove any lingering dust left behind by the vacuum.

- Place a floor mat near every entrance. Winter is a messy season, and it's easy to bring in the great outdoors when you enter your home during cold weather seasons. Dirt that sticks to your shoes may contain potentially harmful chemicals, so place a floor mat near any door where people routinely enter your home and politely ask that all who enter wipe off and remove their shoes before moving about the house.

- Dehumidify your home. Mold and dust mites thrive on moisture, so homeowners concerned about the moisture in their homes during the winter months can purchase a dehumidifier to control

allergens and reduce moisture in the air. In addition to using a dehumidifier, you can control humidity in your home by using an exhaust fan when cooking, addressing leaky plumbing fixtures to prevent mold growth and making sure your clothes dryer is vented to the outside of your home.

- Choose naturally scented laundry products. Everyone wants their freshly cleaned clothes to smell good, but the price you pay when using laundry products that employ synthetic fragrances may be far more steep than you realize. Such synthetic fragrances emit dozens of chemicals into the air, so choose naturally scented detergents, fabric softeners and dryer sheets when possible.

- Avoid plug-in air fresheners. Unless otherwise noted on the packaging, plug-in air fresheners likely contain volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, which contain a variety of chemicals that can negatively impact both short- and long-term health. Instead of plugging in an air freshener to improve a home's interior aroma, slice fresh lemons and leave them out in the kitchen and keep fresh indoor plants in living areas. Studies from NASA have shown that indoor plants naturally purify indoor air by absorbing materials released by synthetic materials.

As winter gets set to return, homeowners can employ several simple strategies to improve indoor air quality in their homes.



The importance of annual health exams

Anual health exams are a key component of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. A person may not see the need to visit the doctor if he or she is feeling well, but not every disease or condition manifests itself in a way that men and women can detect. According to the Unity Point Clinic, nearly one-third of the 133 million Americans living with a chronic disease are unaware of the presence of their conditions. Routine physical exams can detect serious illnesses before they do much damage.

No two physical exams will be exactly alike, but many will share some general features.

HEALTH HISTORY

A crucial element of a physical exam will include a thorough health history if the physician doesn't already have one on file. The doctor will take time to ask questions about family history of illness, health habits, any vices (smoking, drinking alcohol, etc.), exercise schedule, and diet. If there is a possible hereditary health condition running through your family, the doctor may suggest certain testing and make note of potential signs to look for in the future.

CURRENT AILMENTS

After discussing a patient's history, the doctor may ask if they are having any problems they cannot explain. These can include changes in eating or sleeping patterns; aches and pains; lumps or bumps and other abnormalities. Again, the presence of symptoms may be indicative of illness or physical changes, but not all diseases produce obvious symptoms.

VITAL SIGNS

A doctor will check a patient's vital signs during the physical. Areas the doctor will look at include but are not limited to:

- **Heart rate:** This measures the speed at which the heart is pumping. Normal resting heart rate values range from 60 to 100 beats per minute.
- **Blood pressure:** A blood pressure cuff (sphygmomanometer) will measure systolic and diastolic pressure. Systolic pressure measures the force with which the blood is pushing through the arteries. The diastolic blood pressure is the pressure in

the arteries between beats, when the heart rests. The systolic (top number) should be below 120, while the bottom should be less than 80, according to the Mayo Clinic.

- **Respiration rate:** The doctor will measure the number of breaths taken in a minute. WebMD says between 12 and 16 breaths per minute is normal for a healthy adult. Breathing more than 20 times per minute can suggest heart or lung problems.

- **Pulse oximetry:** Johns Hopkins School of Medicine says pulse oximetry is a test used to measure the oxygen level (oxygen saturation) of the blood. It is a measure of how well oxygen is being sent to the parts of your body furthest from your heart. Normal pulse oximeter readings usually range from 95 to 100 percent. Values under 90 percent are considered low.

PHYSICAL EXAM

The examination will also include physical components. The doctor will perform a visual

inspection of the skin and body for any abnormalities, such as the presence of skin cancer. The physician may feel the abdomen to check that internal organs are not distended. Females' physical examinations may include breast and pelvic exams.

Comprehensive testing

In addition to the exam at the office, the physical may include an electrocardiogram, or EKG, to check electrical activity of the heart; blood count and cholesterol checks through bloodwork; body mass index testing; X-rays or MRIs and bone-density tests.

Physical exams remain an important part of staying healthy. Consult with a doctor for more preventative maintenance tips.



Make better choices when dining out

Dining out can make for an enjoyable evening or afternoon. Many people enjoy sampling different cuisines, and eating out removes the pressure and the work required when preparing meals at home.

A 2013 poll from Rasmussen Reports found 58 percent of American adults say they dine out at least once a week, while 14 percent go out two or three times per week and 4 percent eat out more than three times per week.

Dining out is also popular in Canada, where, according to Statistics Canada, restaurant sales per capita have increased steadily during the last 15 years. Across Canada, restaurants took in nearly \$650 per person in 2012.

As the number of people dining out continues to increase, many people find themselves looking for ways to stay focused on healthy eating when they are not the ones preparing their meals. The following are a handful of ways diners can stay healthy without giving up their love of dining out.

- Don't arrive at the restaurant too hungry. Eat a small and filling snack before going to a restaurant. Eating a snack ahead of time will prevent you from overeating once your food arrives. An apple, protein bar or some crackers and cheese can take the edge off hunger and reduce the likelihood that you will overeat at the restaurant.

- Fill up on water. When the server comes to take your drink order, ask for some water if it's not already on the table. The symptoms of dehydration mimic those of hunger. Also, drinking water before and during your meal

will help you to feel full and decrease the likelihood that you will overeat.

- Engage in conversation. Bring someone with you to the restaurant so you can share some lively conversation. The more time you spend talking, the longer it will take to eat, giving your body time to digest and prevent overeating.

- Choose the right foods. When perusing the menu, look for foods cooked a certain way. Broiled and grilled meats are healthier than fried foods, and steamed vegetables contain plenty of vitamins and minerals your body needs to stay healthy. Avoid heavy cream sauces, lots of cheese and fatty meats. Ask if you can substitute fresh vegetables or brown rice for unhealthy sides or white rice.

- Eat more seafood. Seafood is not only flavorful, but healthy as well. Eating certain fish gives your body the right types of fats to help the neurological system function properly and fuel your brain.

- Avoid dining out as a reaction to stress. Don't go out to a restaurant if you are feeling stressed or rushed, especially if you use food as a coping mechanism. You may end up rushing through your meal and eating more than you intended.

- Divide your meal. Share a plate with others or ask for a to-go container when your course is served. This allows you to set aside some leftovers before you start to eat, reducing the likelihood that you will overeat.

Dining out is a favorite activity for many people, and diners can take several steps to make their dining experiences healthier.



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HOW TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY KIDNEYS

Few people devote much thought to their kidneys unless their doctor advises them they are having kidney troubles. But kidneys perform essential functions in the human body, filtering water and waste out of blood and urine while also helping to control blood pressure. When operating correctly, kidneys can go a long way toward ensuring a healthy life. But when kidneys are compromised, the results can be very harmful to human health.

Kidney disease is no small cause for concern, as the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases notes that more than 20 million Americans may have kidney disease, with millions more being at risk. Kidney disease may be even more problematic in Canada, where the Kidney Foundation of Canada reports that one in 10 Canadians has kidney disease.

Though family history is one risk factor for kidney disease, it's not just genetics that put people at risk. People with diabetes, high blood pressure and/or cardiovascular disease are also at risk of developing kidney disease, which develops gradually and does not often produce

physical symptoms until it has reached an advanced stage. Because people may not detect symptoms of kidney disease until it reaches an advanced stage, the NIDDK recommends people schedule routine blood tests to check their glomerular filtration rate, or GFR, which checks to see how well kidneys are filtering. The NIDDK also notes the importance of routine urine tests, which check for protein in urine. The presence of the protein albumin in urine indicates kidney damage.

In addition to routine screenings, people can take the following steps to maintain healthy kidneys so they can live long, healthy and active lives.

- **Maintain a healthy blood pressure.** A healthy blood pressure can delay or prevent the onset of kidney disease. The American Heart Association advises that a normal healthy blood pressure is a systolic number (the top number) less than 120 and a diastolic number (the bottom number) less than 80. The systolic number measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats, while the diastolic number measures the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats. Have your blood pressure measured by



your physician on each visit (and no less than once per year), and speak with him or her about ways to lower your blood pressure if it is high or if your blood pressure falls in the prehypertension range (120-139 over 80-89), which means you are at risk of developing high blood pressure.

- **Reduce sodium consumption.** One simple way to protect your kidneys is to consume less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium each day. Though sodium serves some essential functions in the body, helping it to regulate blood pressure among other things, people with kidney disease cannot eliminate excess sodium and fluid from their bodies. The resulting buildup in the tissues and bloodstream can contribute to high blood pressure.

- **Limit alcohol intake.** The NIDDK advises that limiting alcohol intake can help to keep kidneys healthy and operating at full strength. Alcohol impacts the body in various ways, and kidneys are not immune to the effects of

alcohol. Alcohol can cause changes in the kidneys that compromise their ability to filter blood. Alcohol also can affect the ability of kidneys to maintain the right amount of water in the body. That's because alcohol consumed in excess dehydrates the body, making it harder for cells and organs, including the kidneys, to function normally. Speak with your physician about your alcohol consumption and what is considered healthy for someone in your situation.

- **Consume a kidney-friendly diet.** The right diet also can help people maintain healthy kidneys. A diet that includes kidney-friendly foods can prevent the buildup of waste in the kidneys while also helping people maintain healthy blood pressures. The National Kidney Foundation notes that foods such as apples, blueberries, fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, and kale are just a few kidney-friendly foods.

Healthy kidneys can contribute to long, healthy lives. Learn more about the kidneys at www.kidney.org.

HOW WOMEN CAN COMBAT HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol can dramatically affect a person's long-term health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people with high total cholesterol have approximately twice the risk of developing heart disease as people whose cholesterol levels are ideal. And contrary to what many people may think, women are no less susceptible to high cholesterol than men.

Cholesterol can be a confusing topic. Though cholesterol has a bad reputation, that stature can be somewhat misleading. That's because there are two types of cholesterol, one of which actually reduces a person's risk for heart disease and stroke. High-density lipoprotein, often referred to as "HDL" or "good" cholesterol, absorbs low-density lipoprotein, or "bad" cholesterol, or "LDL," and carries it back to the liver, which then flushes it from the body. HDL accounts for a minority of the body's cholesterol. Unfortunately, the majority of cholesterol in the body is LDL, high levels of which can contribute to plaque buildup in the arteries, increasing a person's risk for heart disease and stroke.

A 2015 report from the American Heart Association indicated that more than 73 million American adults have high LDL cholesterol. The 2013 Canadian Health Measures Survey found that, between 2009 and 2011, the number of Canadians with unhealthy levels of LDL increased significantly with age, with 40 percent of men and women between the ages of 40 and 59 suffering from unhealthy LDL levels.

Women may think that the presence of the female sex hormone estrogen can positively impact their cholesterol levels. While estrogen tends to raise HDL levels, its presence alone does not mean women are out of the woods with regard to cardiovascular disease, including heart disease and stroke. In fact, the CDC notes that heart disease remains the leading cause of death among women.

High LDL cholesterol levels do not mean women will automatically develop heart disease, but women who receive such a diagnosis should take the following steps to lower their LDL levels so they can live longer, healthier lives.

- Eat right. Avoid foods that are high in fat,

especially saturated fats and trans fats. The AHA notes that foods that contain saturated fats contribute to high levels of LDL. Fatty beef, lamb, pork, poultry with skin, lard and cream, butter, and cheese are just a few of the foods that contain saturated fats. Those foods all come from animal sources, but many baked goods and fried foods are also high in saturated fat and should be avoided. Fruits, vegetables and whole grains are heart-healthy foods that can help women lower their LDL levels and reduce their risk for cardiovascular disease.

- Exercise regularly. Routine physical activity can help women lower their LDL levels, especially when such exercise is combined with a healthy diet. The Office on Women's Health recommends women get two hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week, or one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity each week. Speak with your physician to learn which exercises are most appropriate for someone in your condition. Women who want to do more than aerobic activity can still meet their exercise requirements by combining moderate and vigorous cardiovascular exercise with muscle-strengthening activities two or more days per week.

- Quit smoking. Smoking can accelerate the damage already being done by high cholesterol. While research does not indicate that smoking directly impacts LDL levels, the toxins produced and inhaled from cigarettes can modify existing LDL, making it more likely to cause inflammation.

Cholesterol does not discriminate, and women need to be just as mindful as men when monitoring their total cholesterol levels.



THE BEST (AND WORST) FOODS FOR HEART HEALTH



No one wants to hear from their doctors that they have joined the millions of people across the globe to be diagnosed with heart disease. The Heart Foundation reports that heart disease, which includes diseases of the heart and cardiovascular system and stroke, is the No. 1 cause of death in the United States, affecting both men and women and most racial/ethnic groups. Heart disease also is one of the leading causes of death in Canada, claiming more than 33,000 lives per year.

Many factors contribute to the development of heart disease, including smoking, lack of exercise and stress. Diet and whether a person is overweight or obese also can have a direct link to heart health. Diet, particularly for those with diabetes and poorly controlled blood sugar levels, is a major concern.

A variety of foods are considered helpful for maintaining a strong and healthy heart and cardiovascular system, while others can contribute to conditions that may eventually lead to cardiovascular disease or

cardiac arrest. Moderation enables a person to sample a little of everything, but not to make any one food a habit. The following are some foods to promote heart health and some foods you might want to avoid.

GOOD

- **Tree nuts:** Tree nuts contain unsaturated fats that can help lower LDL cholesterol (the bad stuff) and improve HDL (the good stuff). Nuts also are a filling source of protein and other healthy nutrients.

- **Whole grains:** Whole grains contain complex carbohydrates for energy, as well as protein and fiber. Fiber can help scrub cholesterol from the blood, lowering bad cholesterol levels.

- **Fatty fish:** Many cold-water, fatty fish, such as halibut, herring and salmon, contain omega-3 fatty acids, which are heart-healthy. Omega-3s also can be found in walnuts, flaxseed and some soy products.

- **Beans:** Beans and other legumes are an excellent source of protein and can be a stand-in for meats that are high in saturated fat. Beans also contain cholesterol-

lowering soluble fiber and folate, which can reduce blood homocystein levels. The Bean Institute reports that consuming beans may reduce cholesterol levels by roughly six to 10 percent.

- **Yogurt:** Researchers in Japan found yogurt may protect against gum disease. Left untreated, gum disease may elevate a person's risk for heart disease. Yogurt contains good bacteria that can counteract bad bacteria and boost immunity.

- **Raisins:** Raisins contain antioxidants that may help reduce inflammation. Inflammation is often linked to heart disease and other debilitating conditions. Fresh produce also is a good source of antioxidants.

POOR

- **Fried foods:** Many fried foods have little nutritional value, as they tend to be high in saturated and trans fats. French fries are particularly bad because they are carbohydrates fried and then doused in salt.

- **Sausage:** Processed meats have frequently earned a bad reputation among cardiologists, but sausage can be a big offender, due in large part to

its high saturated fat content.

- **Red meats:** Enjoying a steak is probably not as bad as eating a deep-fried brownie, but it's best to limit red meat consumption to about 10 percent or less of your diet. Red meats can have a considerable amount of cholesterol, saturated fat and calories.

- **Added sugars:** Sugar can increase blood pressure and triglyceride levels. Sugar often hides out in foods that you would not associate with the sweetener. Plus, many people unwittingly consume too much sugar simply through sugar-sweetened beverages and ready-to-eat cereals.

- **Salty foods:** Leave the salt shaker in the spice cabinet and opt for herbs for flavoring, advises the American Heart Association. High-sodium diets often are to blame for hypertension, a major risk factor for heart disease.

- **Dairy:** Artery-clogging saturated fat also can be found in dairy products, particularly the full-fat versions. Butter, sour cream and milk can be problematic when people overindulge. Opt for low-fat dairy when possible.

Stress-free holiday travel season tips

Millions of people fly the friendly skies, ride the rails or hit the highway come the holiday season. Such travel can be both expensive and stressful. But holiday travel need not be so costly or tense. The following are a handful of tips to help travelers enjoy successful and stress-free travel this holiday season.

- **Reserve early.** Fares only rise as the holidays draw closer. It's unlikely you will score a last-minute deal by waiting until the last minute to book holiday travel, as discount fares are largely a thing of past. If your travel schedule is inflexible, book as early as possible. You

might be able to save some money if you have some flexibility with regard to your travel schedule.

- **Fly on the holiday.** Very often flying on popular holidays, including Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, is less expensive than flying on the surrounding days. If your goal is to save money and you don't mind showing up on the holiday itself, then flying on the holiday may earn you the most savings.

- **Book a business hotel.** Hotels that cater to business clientele in big cities often reduce their rates during the holidays, when business travel tends to wane.

- **Consider flying into and**

out of smaller airports. What they lack in size, number of flights and modern comforts, smaller airports can make up for in fewer delays and smaller crowds. Flying into and out of a smaller airport may be especially advantageous if such an airport is closer to your home or final destination.

- **Get pre-screened security clearance.** The TSA Pre-Check Program enables some people to move quickly through security checkpoints. This can help save a considerable amount of time. Visit www.tsa.gov to learn who qualifies.

- **Do not wrap gifts prior to traveling.**

- **Have an alternate plan in place.** Unforeseeable delays or cancellations can turn even the most carefully planned itinerary on its head. Keep phone numbers for taxi services and hotels handy just in case your flight is delayed and you do not want to spend a night at the airport.

- **Avoid domestic or popular holiday destinations.**

- **Take your turn hosting.** People who do the holiday hosting do not have to worry about holiday travel at all. Even though it can mean more prep work and cleanup, hosting duty saves you the headaches and expenses of holiday travel.

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