

UNCOMMON TIPS TO PROTECT THE HEART

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You've heard the usual tips for preventing heart disease. You know about the bad effects of cigarette smoking, alcohol, fatty foods, and stress. You know that you have to control your blood sugar and blood pressure to prevent diabetes and high blood pressure, respectively. But what more can you do to protect your heart? Find out the latest buzzwords in heart disease.



1. Buy household plants. We learned in science class that plants take in carbon dioxide and give off oxygen. Humans, on the other hand, give off carbon dioxide and need lifesaving oxygen. So it makes common sense that the more plants we have (the more trees we plant), the better it is for our polluted environment. A NASA study shows that household plants can also remove toxins in the environment. Try placing a few plants inside your house.
2. Get a pet dog. Studies show that dogs offer some benefit to sick people. Dogs give companionship and love to their owner. However, studies show that cats are not as effective. As one pet lover says, "When your dog sees you, his jump of glee says, 'Here's my master.' But when your cat sees you, the way he puts his nose up says, 'Oh, here's my slave.'"
3. Floss and brush your teeth. Recent studies show that gum disease is associated with heart disease and may reduce your lifespan by three years. Inflammation of the gums is related to inflammation of the heart arteries. Also, oral infection can lead to a dangerous infection of the heart valves. Brush your teeth twice or thrice a day. Use a tongue cleaner. And remember to floss at least once a day.
4. Try nasal breathing. For over 2,000 years, Chinese medicine has been practicing the benefits of breathing through the nose instead of the mouth. Recently, researchers discovered the scientific explanation for this technique. It appears that nasal breathing stimulates the production of nitrous oxide, which is a beneficial gas that dilates the blood vessels of the body. So, it's very good for the lungs and the heart.
5. Try deep and slow nasal breathing several times in the morning and at night. Also, use your belly or diaphragm to breathe in (expand your waistline as you breathe) and not your chest. You can suck in more oxygen this way. Do this whenever you are stressed. It's good for the heart and increases the oxygen in your blood from 96 to 99 percent.
6. Have supportive friends. A unique study shows that talking to a supportive friend for an hour is as effective as taking a tablet of pain reliever. Good friends can reduce your stress level

by up to 90 percent. There is something heavenly in true and caring friends. Invest your time in building close relationships. They are as good as money in the bank.

7. Laugh 15 minutes a day. Laughter is, indeed, the best medicine. A study from the University of California Irvine College of Medicine reports that after watching a funny video, the viewers' mood improved dramatically. Depression and anger dropped by 98 percent, fatigue fell by 87 percent, and tension was reduced by 61 percent. What happens inside our body when we laugh? The level of stress hormones (called cortisol) decreases, and the good hormones (called endorphins) increase. Endorphins are natural substances in the body that make you happy and boost your immune system.

8. Be charitable. Doing various kinds of good deeds every week helps you live happier and longer. Charitable people who have suffered a heart attack tend to live longer compared to other patients who are not as charitable. Perhaps this is because charitable people have more social support and people praying for their recovery. Similarly, Prof. Peggy Thoits' study at the Vanderbilt University showed that people who volunteered and helped others had higher levels of happiness, self-esteem, and better physical health. If you want to receive P2,000 worth of health and happiness, try donating P2,000 to your favorite charity.

9. Be in love. Gerontology professor Dr. David Demko believes that being in love can prolong one's life by as much as seven years. Married people or those with close relationships are generally happier compared to single people living alone. If you don't have a partner, then having a close friend, pet or hobby can be a substitute.

10. Have sex (if your doctor allows it). Studies show that healthy men who have sex three times a week can decrease their risk for a heart attack or stroke. Women who enjoy sex also tend to live longer than those who don't. Studies also show that increasing your sexual activity from once a month to once a week also increases your general happiness. Sex makes one feel good and happy. It's also good exercise for the heart. How does a person know if he or she is strong enough for sex? One simple test is to climb two flights of stairs. If you can do this without being short of breath, then you are probably cleared to have sex.

11. Eat two bananas a day. Bananas contain potassium, an essential mineral needed to regulate water balance, acidity level, and blood pressure of the body. Lack of potassium may cause muscle weakness and irregular heartbeat. Take note also that bananas have zero sodium (good for high blood pressure) and zero fat and cholesterol (good for those with high cholesterol). Bananas also have tryptophan, which makes you feel happier. So take two bananas a day to keep the doctor away.

12. Relax and sleep. Try using mind-body techniques like meditation, yoga, visualization, and biofeedback. Take a vacation and travel if you can. Whatever relaxes you is good for your heart. Sleeping and resting is another great way to boost your energy. The best sleep is at night for at least seven to eight hours. Try to be asleep from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. because this is the time the liver exerts its regenerating powers.

13. Pray. Studies show that people who have a strong sense of spirituality are 40 percent happier than those who don't. People who hope for a brighter future and have a purpose in their

lives tend to be happier and more fulfilled.