

- Smoking

## A healthy lifestyle is key to a healthy heart

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If you want to take care of the health of your heart, don't smoke or quit tobacco use.



Former Health Secretary Dr. Jaime Galvez Tan warned that tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke has devastating effects to our heart's health.

Citing data from the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Galvez Tan, who is also a trustee of Healthjustice Philippines, said that globally, tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke contribute to approximately 12 percent of all heart disease deaths.

"To keep yourself healthy you should protect your heart by doing exercise, quit smoking, lose weight, and eat hearthealthy foods," Dr. Galvez Tan said.

Smoking as top causes of deaths and diseases

THE Philippine Statistics Authority lists five other non-communicable diseases linked to smoking as top causes of deaths and diseases among Filipinos and these are cancers, stroke, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, other heart diseases.

The WHO also said that cardiovascular diseases (CVDS) are the world's leading killer, causing one in every three deaths.

In the Philippines, cardiovascular diseases are also the number one cause of death, with an estimated 50,000 dying every year.

When an individual quits smoking, according to Tobacco Free Initiative's Factsheet about health benefits of smoking cessation, within 20 minutes his heart rate and blood pressure drops.

Within 12 hours, the carbon monoxide level in the blood drops to normal. If the smoker ceases to use tobacco for a year, his risk of coronary heart diseases reduces to about half compared to a current smoker.

In five years, stroke risk is reduced to that of a non-smoker.

"To have a healthier heart, all you have to do is quit smoking. It is one of the best things you will ever do not only for your physical health but mental health as well," Dr. Galvez Tan exclaimed.

To achieve a healthier heart. Here are a few practical steps you can follow according to WHO:

#### 1. Eat a heart healthy diet

A HEART healthy diet consists of a combination of different foods including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and nuts. Cut down on salty meats such as ham, bacon, tocino, sausage, hotdog, as well as salty food such as dried fish. Use calamansi juice and vinegar to season your food instead of high-sodium condiments such as soy sauce, fish sauce, bagoong, and ketchup. Avoid the consumption of processed, canned, and fast food. replace sweetened snacks such as doughnuts, cookies, and the like with fresh fruit and vegetables and if thirsty, substitute sweetened beverage sodas and sweetened juices with water.

#### 2. If overweight, lose weight

OVERWEIGHT and obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 25 and above. Central obesity or adiposity on the other hand is a high waist circumference of more than 80 cm for females and more than 90 cm for males. A high waist circumference points to more intra-abdominal fat and is associated with a higher risk for developing cardiovascular disease. Try to reduce 500 kilocalories in your daily diet, which will help bring about an average weight loss of approximately half to almost one kilogram a week.

#### 3. Increase regular physical activity to at least 2.5 hours per week

PHYSICAL activity contributes to improved blood pressure, improved levels of cholesterol and other blood lipids, and weight control. Some physical activity is better than none. Inactive people can start with small amounts of physical activity (even as a part of their normal daily activities) and gradually increase duration, frequency and intensity. Adults are recommended to perform at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity (e.g. brisk walking, climbing stairs, dancing, gardening or doing household chores which can result in mild increase of heart rate) spread throughout the week.

#### 4. Don't use tobacco

TOBACCO use and exposure to secondhand smoke are harmful to your heart. Quitting tobacco use is the biggest gift of health you can give your heart and has immediate and long-term health benefits, including living up to 10 years longer. After a year of quitting, the risk of heart disease is about half that of a smoker. Fifteen years after quitting, the risk of heart disease is the same as that of a non-smoker.

#### 5. Avoid use of alcohol

ALCOHOL consumption has been linked to more than 200 disease and injury conditions, including cardiovascular diseases. While most Filipinos report their alcohol drinking as

occasional, binge drinking is common in the country. There is no safe level for drinking alcohol, so it is better to avoid drinking alcohol altogether to protect your heart.

#### 6. Have your blood pressure and blood sugar checked regularly

An important way to maintain a healthy heart is for your blood pressure and blood sugar to be checked regularly by a health worker. Some people do not exhibit symptoms even if they already have high blood pressure—and it can hurt your heart. It is also important to talk to your health worker if you have behavioral risks (unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, use of tobacco and alcohol) so they can help you plan the lifestyle modifications you should take to get your heart health back on track. If you are diagnosed with hypertension or diabetes, set targets with your health worker and take your medicines regularly.