- Heart / Blood pressure

Good Health

A Healthier Heart TODAY!

Who knew caring for your ticker could be so enjoyable? Read on for feel-great how-to's

BY BRENDA KEARNS



LOWERS BLOOD PRESSURE

Stretching

Keeping your blood pressure below 120/80 mm Hg slows aging and stiffening of delicate arteries, cutting your risk of heart troubles by 58% or more. And Canadian researchers say spending about 20 minutes daily doing relaxing stretches can lower your blood pressure more quickly and effectively than brisk walks can! Their study shows that deep stretches activate a series of nerves (the parasympathetic nervous system) that help arteries stay relaxed and open.

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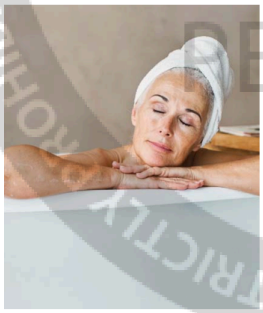
BOOSTS CHOLESTEROL CONTROL

A daily apple

It does more than keep the doctor away! Earlier research suggested that enjoying one large apple daily could protect against heart disease as effectively as statins do. And now experts have figured out why. According to a study published in the journal *Food Science & Nutrition,* apple compounds heighten your liver's ability to track and control blood fats, tamping down production of artery-clogging LDL cholesterol and triglycerides while keeping your levels of artery-clearing HDL cholesterol high.





STEADIES BLOOD SUGAR

A steamy bath

You know that keeping blood-sugar levels steady can protect against diabetes, but it also helps your cardiovascular system function at its peak, reducing your risk of developing heart disease by as much as 75%. And treating yourself to a hot, steamy bath can help! That's the word from Dutch investigators, who explain that daily spikes in skin temperature activate genes that boost insulin sensitivity in cells, helping the body quickly burn excess blood glucose for fuel.

KEEPS ARTERIES CLEAR

A list of blessings

Feeling unsettled or stressed? Writing down the blessings in your life could calm your nerves and protect your heart at the same time. Italian scientists say keeping stress in check (by focusing on gratitude, optimism or spirituality) cuts heart disease risk by 43%. The reason? Chronic exposure to the stress hormone cortisol speeds plaque buildup in arteries, while daily pockets of calm ensure blood vessels stay young and supple.



PREVENTS BLOOD CLOTS

Vitamin D3

Researchers have long known that supplementing with 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 daily can prevent bone thinning and strengthen immunity, shoring up your protection against everything from colds to Covid-19. More good news: Mayo Clinic scientists now say vitamin D3 is a gentle natural blood thinner that can halve your risk of developing a dangerous clot—the type that can trigger a heart attack or stroke.



STRENGTHENS THE HEART

A monthly girls' night

Getting together once a month to chat and laugh with a great friend could improve your heart health as effectively as sticking to a healthy diet can, according to Purdue University researchers. They discovered that the happiness surge that comes from spending time with people you treasure switches on anti-aging genes that keep the heart muscle strong and pumping smoothly, reducing your risk of developing heart disease.

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