

Be heart smart

Your heart is one impressive overachieving organ, yet despite your ticker's superpowers, 215 people die every day from heart disease or strokes. While the numbers are high, prevention is far simpler than the figures suggest.

It turns out that a few simple lifestyle tweaks can help you live a long, healthy life. You don't need to become a super athlete or go on a very strict diet to protect your heart and lower your risk of heart disease.

When it comes to keeping your coronary health in check, you need to take a holistic approach to wellness.

Moving your body may be your first point of call. Research published in the journal *Circulation* found that working out for 30 minutes a day minimised the risk of heart failure by 10%. It's essential to be active in some way every day of the week. However, don't set yourself up for failure; find something you enjoy and start small.

Also, eat your heart to good health. We are all aware that a diet rich in omega-3s is the way to go. Eat more salmon or sardines; these stinky-good fish are full of goodness. Also, minimise added sugars, it will give you extra calories without vitamins and minerals causing you to gain weight, which will raise your risk of coronary heart disease. Also, pass the salt – no seriously – Your body counteracts sodium intake by releasing extra water into the blood, leading to increased blood volume and a seriously overworked heart.

Okay, so you're hitting the gym, eating healthy, and stubbed out the smokes... what more could you do to improve your heart health?

We have a few ideas to get you started:

- **Be more intimate.** It can reduce your risk of heart disease by lowering blood pressure and reducing stress. Just being aroused can trigger your brain to release hormones such as dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), which may improve circulatory system function and boost cardiac performance.
- **Drink wine with dinner.** Drinking one – we repeat one – glass of red wine a day can decrease the chance of heart disease by 25%.
- **Eat more dark chocolate.** A research study published in 2016 concluded that chocolate consumption is associated with lower myocardial infarction and heart disease.
- **Calm your mind.** Fact: stress and heart disease go hand-in-hand. Enough said.
- **Floss every day.** Did you know that your chances of having a heart attack may double if you have gum disease? If you're breeding bacteria between your teeth, inflammation puts all your vital organs on chronic alert.
- **Get more Zzz's.** Even if you feel awake after a triple-shot Americano, you still can't get by on 4 or 5 hours of sleep. Over time chronic sleep deprivation increases your adrenaline and stress hormones, jacking up your heart rate and blood pressure and overloading your heart.

Being heart smart means making smart choices now that will pay off later.

You're never too young – or too old – to take care of your heart.

Source: heartfoundation.co.za, menshealth.com, womanshealth.gov, womanshealthmag.com, heart.org, crestline.com