

Heart Healthy Tips for Your Members

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75 percent of individuals over the age of 65 live with heart disease, and it's the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States.¹

February is American Heart Month. Throughout the month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Heart Association, and other health organizations and agencies focus on cardiovascular health, and the attention is well deserved.

To help you with your member engagement strategy for American Heart Month, we're providing 28 heart health tips to share with your membership – one for each day of February. With these convenient tips, you can help seniors reduce their risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. You can share a tip each day in February via email, your member newsletter, webpage page, etc., or send one communication with the highest impact tips (marked with an asterisk).

Regardless of how you share these tips, don't forget to remind your members how important they – and their hearts – are to you. For more helpful heart health content, visit Hello Heart's Heart Health Hub.

28 Heart Health Tips from Healthline²

1. ***Know your numbers.**

Keeping your blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood sugar checked is important for good heart health. Ask your doctor about the optimal levels for your gender and age group, and take steps to reach and maintain those levels. To help you stay on top of your blood pressure, consider an at-home blood pressure monitor and measure your blood pressure regularly. And remember to schedule regular check-ups with your doctor. If you want to make your doctor happy, keep good records of your vitals or lab numbers, and bring them to your appointments.

¹ Ahmed FB, Anderson RN. The Leading Causes of Death in the US for 2020. *JAMA*. 2021;325(18):1829-1830. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2778234>. Accessed December 29, 2022.

² Healthline Editorial Team. 28 Healthy Heart Tips. Healthline website. <https://www.healthline.com/health/healthy-heart-tips>. Medically Reviewed by the University of Illinois. Updated August 12, 2020. Accessed December 20, 2022.

2. *Treat your high blood pressure.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is one of the biggest risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Millions of Americans live with it and don't know they have it (or don't stick to their prescribed treatment plan). High blood pressure is often treatable with lifestyle changes, such as eating a balanced and nutritious diet, getting regular exercise, keeping stress low, and aiming for 8 hours of sleep in a 24-hour day. But your doctor could also recommend managing your hypertension with medication. Remember always to take your medication as prescribed. **Just because you might not feel it doing its job doesn't mean it's not working.**

3. *Stop smoking – no ifs, ands, or butts.

There are many steps you can take to help protect your health and blood vessels. Avoiding tobacco is one of the best. Smoking is one of the top controllable risk factors for heart disease. If you smoke or use other tobacco products, the [American Heart Association](#), [National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#) (NHLBI), and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) all encourage you to quit. It can make a huge difference to not just your heart but your overall health, too.

4. Focus on the middle.

That is, focus on your middle. Research in the [Journal of the American College of Cardiology](#) has linked excess belly fat to higher blood pressure and unhealthy blood lipid levels. If you're carrying extra fat around your middle, it's time to slim down. Eating fewer calories and exercising more can make a big difference.

5. Knit a scarf.

Put your hands to work to help your mind unwind. Knitting, sewing, and crocheting can help relieve stress and do your ticker some good. Other relaxing hobbies, such as woodworking, cooking, or completing jigsaw puzzles, may also help take the edge off stressful days.

6. Power up your salsa with beans.

When paired with low-fat chips or fresh veggies, salsa offers a delicious and antioxidant-rich snack. Consider mixing in a can of black beans for an added boost of heart-healthy fiber. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), a diet rich in soluble fiber can help lower your low-density lipoprotein, or "bad cholesterol." Other rich sources of soluble fiber include oats, barley, apples, pears, and avocados.

7. Let the music move you.

Whether you prefer a rumba beat or a two-step tune, dancing makes for a great heart-healthy workout. Like other forms of aerobic exercise, it raises your heart rate and gets your lungs pumping. It also burns up to 200 calories or more per hour, according to the [Mayo Clinic](#).

8. Go fish.

Eating a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids can help prevent heart disease. Many fish, such as salmon, tuna, sardines, and herring, are rich sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Try to eat fish at least twice a week, suggests the [American Heart Association](#). If you're concerned about mercury or other contaminants in fish, you may be happy to learn that its heart-healthy benefits outweigh the risks for [many people](#).

9. Laugh out loud.

Don't just "LOL" in emails or Facebook posts. Laugh out loud in your daily life. Whether you like watching funny movies or cracking jokes with friends, laughter may be good for your heart. According to the [American Heart Association](#), research suggests laughing can lower stress hormones, decrease inflammation in your arteries, and raise your levels of high-density lipoprotein (HDL), also known as "good cholesterol."

10. Stretch it out.

Yoga can help you improve your balance, flexibility, and strength. It can help you relax and relieve stress. As if that's not enough, yoga also has the potential to improve heart health. According to research published in the [Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine](#), yoga demonstrates the potential to reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

11. Raise a glass.

Moderate consumption of alcohol can help raise your levels of HDL – or good cholesterol. It can also help prevent blood clot formation and artery damage. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), red wine, in particular, may offer benefits for your heart. That doesn't mean you should guzzle it at every meal. The key is only to drink alcohol in moderation.

12. Sidestep salt.

If the entire U.S. population reduced its average salt intake to just half a teaspoon per day, it would significantly cut the number of people who develop coronary heart disease every year, report researchers in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#). The authors suggest that salt is one of the leading drivers of rising healthcare costs in the United States. Processed and restaurant-prepared foods tend to be especially high in salt. So think twice before filling up on

your favorite fast-food fix. Consider using a salt substitute, such as Dash, if you have high blood pressure or heart failure.

13. Move it, move it, move it.

No matter how much you weigh, sitting for long periods could shorten your lifespan, warn researchers in the [Archives of Internal Medicine](#) and the [American Heart Association](#). If you spend most of your day sitting down, remember to take regular breaks to move around. Go for a stroll with a friend or your family, and enjoy regular exercise in your leisure time.

14. Eat chocolate.

Dark chocolate not only tastes delicious, but it also contains heart-healthy flavonoids. These compounds help reduce inflammation and lower your risk of heart disease, suggest scientists in the journal [Nutrients](#). **Eaten in moderation**, dark chocolate — not over-sweetened milk chocolate, and not brands containing cadmium or lead — can be good for you. The next time you want to indulge your sweet tooth, sink it into a square or two of dark chocolate. No guilt is required.

Concerned about recent reports of heavy metals in dark chocolate? Learn more [here](#).

15. Kick your housework up a notch.

Vacuuming or mopping the floors may not be as invigorating as a Body Slam or Zumba class. But these activities and other household chores do get you moving. They can give your heart a little workout while burning calories, too. Put your favorite music on and add some pep to your step while you complete your weekly chores.

16. Move your body.

Exercise remains one of the best ways to maintain a healthy heart and improve your heart health. There are useful exercises for those in their 60s, 70s, and 80s that can go a long way toward helping you. Consider routines like walking, attending resistance training classes, or yoga. Whatever routine you choose, before you start, you should check with your doctor to ensure it is appropriate and safe for you.

17. Go nuts.

Almonds, walnuts, pecans, and other tree nuts deliver a powerful punch of heart-healthy fats, protein, and fiber. Including them in your diet can help lower your risk of cardiovascular disease. Remember to keep the serving size small, suggests the [American Heart Association](#). While nuts are full of healthy stuff, they're also high in calories.

18. Be a kid.

Fitness doesn't have to be boring. Let your inner child take the lead by enjoying an evening of dancing, bowling, or laser tag. You can have fun while burning calories and giving your heart a workout.

19. Consider pet therapy.

Our pets offer more than good company and unconditional love. They also provide numerous health benefits. Studies reported by the [National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH) suggest that owning a pet may help improve your heart and lung function. It may also help lower your chances of dying from heart disease.

20. Start and stop.

Start and stop, then start and stop again. During interval training, you alternate bursts of intense physical activity with bouts of lighter activity. The [Mayo Clinic](#) reports that doing so can boost the calories you burn while working out.

21. Cut the fat.

Slicing your saturated fat intake to 10 percent or less of your daily calories can cut your risk of heart disease, advises the [USDA](#). If you don't usually read nutrition labels, consider starting today. Take stock of what you're eating, and avoid foods high in saturated fat.

22. Take the scenic route home.

Put down your cell phone, forget about the driver who cut you off, and enjoy your ride. Eliminating stress while driving can help lower your blood pressure and stress levels. That's something your cardiovascular system will appreciate.

23. Make time for breakfast.

The first meal of the day is an important one. Eating a nutritious breakfast daily can help you maintain a healthy diet and weight. To build a heart-healthy meal, reach for

- Whole grains, such as oatmeal, whole-grain cereals, or whole-wheat toast
- Lean protein sources, such as turkey bacon or a small serving of nuts or peanut butter
- Low-fat dairy products, such as low-fat milk, yogurt, or cheese
- Fruits and vegetables

24. Take the stairs.

Exercise is essential for good heart health, so why not sneak it in at every opportunity? Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park on the far side of the parking lot. Play with your dog or grandkids at the park instead of watching them. Every little bit adds up to better fitness.

25. Brew up a heart-healthy potion.

No magic is needed to brew a cup of green or black tea. Drinking one to three cups of tea daily may help lower your risk of heart problems, reports the [American Heart Association](#). For example, it's linked to lower rates of angina and heart attacks.

26. Brush your teeth regularly.

Good oral hygiene does more than keep your teeth white and glistening. According to the [Cleveland Clinic](#), some research suggests that the bacteria that cause gum disease can also raise your risk of heart disease. While the research findings have been mixed, there's no downside to taking good care of your teeth and gums.

27. Walk it off.

The next time you feel overwhelmed, exasperated, or angry, take a stroll. Even a five-minute walk can help clear your head and lower your stress levels, which is good for your health. A half-hour walk daily is even better for your physical and mental health.

28. Find your happy place.

A sunny outlook may be good for your heart, as well as your mood. According to the [Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health](#), chronic stress, anxiety, and anger can raise your risk of heart disease and stroke. Maintaining a positive outlook on life may help you stay healthier for longer.

Bonus Tips

Make time to visit your healthcare provider.

Annual physical exams will allow your doctor to monitor your risk factors for heart disease and make sure you are diagnosed and treated properly.