

6 Weeks of Heart Healthy Tips

Implement one tip a day for six weeks to improve your cardiovascular health

- 1. Remember the turtle:** Slow and steady wins the race. If you start eating healthy and exercising on January 1 and lose just one pound a week, you'll be 52 pounds lighter on December 31.
- 2. To make physical activity a habit,** choose an activity you really like. Then start slowly and gradually increase the time and intensity. Pretty soon, you'll have all the gain without any pain!
- 3. Turkey surprise!** Replace ground beef in recipes with ground turkey. You can add spices to make up for turkey's milder flavor.
- 4. To increase your physical activity,** wear a pedometer for a week or two to find out how many steps you take on average each day. Then every two weeks increase your daily average by 500 steps. Before you know it, you'll hit 10,000 steps a day!
- 5. Reducing your sodium intake** can help control your blood pressure. Do it gradually to let your taste buds adjust. Use fresh, frozen and canned vegetables without added salt.
- 6. Listening to music can help make exercise more fun** so you'll do it longer.
- 7. A fiber-rich diet helps lower LDL** (bad) cholesterol, raise HDL (good) cholesterol levels and helps control glucose levels. Fiber-rich foods include oats, peas, beans, apples and carrots. Your daily fiber intake should be 25–30 grams.
- 8. When cooking, use lower-fat substitutes.** Use low-fat yogurt instead of sour cream. Replace ground meat with beans or rice. And substitute egg whites for whole eggs.
- 9. Want new ways to improve your fitness?** Help in your neighborhood. Consider volunteering for a landscaping project, helping elderly neighbors with their yards or working in community housing projects.
- 10. Beware!** With toppings and dressing, fast-food salads can have as many calories as a hamburger. Pick darker greens and vegetables for their vitamin and fiber content and skip the croutons, sour cream and taco chips. Use low-fat salad dressing and dip your fork in it before spearing your salad.
- 11. Be creative!** Change "onefer" activities into "twofers." Do lunges while you vacuum. Stretch your neck and shoulders while you drive. And if you can, walk while you have a meeting.
- 12. Fit in fitness wherever you can.** Park farther from the door when you go to the bank. When your family visits for holidays, take a walk with them to catch up.
- 13. Choose your calories!** That 100-calorie pie isn't the same as 100 calories of broccoli. The pie's calories come from fat, while the broccoli's comes from carbohydrates, fiber and minerals. Consider what will most benefit your body.
- 14. End your meal with sugar-free, fat-free frozen yogurt** or a small cone of fat-free yogurt. Ices, sorbets and sherbets have less fat and fewer calories than ice cream, but they're chock full of sugar.
- 15. Skipping rope is a classic exercise** you're never too old to do. Use heavy cotton or hemp rope. To measure the right length, fold the rope in half. It should reach from your armpit to the floor.
- 16. Be alert for traps.** Fat-free breakfast muffins may have lots of sugar. And skinless fried chicken can have almost as much fat as the regular kind.
- 17. To work out harder on a treadmill, increase the elevation.** Or just walk once or twice a week in a hilly area to increase the intensity of your workouts.

6 Weeks of Heart Healthy Tips *(continued)*

- 18. You don't have to give up all the foods you like.** It's the size of the portion that counts. And if you reduce the number of high-fat foods you eat, you can lose a significant amount of weight.
- 19. Keeping a record of what you eat every day** is the best way to succeed at losing weight and keeping the pounds off. It helps you spot problems and patterns, and record your progress. Keeping up with your record takes practice but the benefits are worth it!
- 20. When dining out, cut fat calories** by choosing grilled or broiled meats. Also look for lower-fat meats, such as sirloin. Finally, request a small serving size.
- 21. The best vegetable oils are canola and olive oil.** They're low in saturated fat and have the most monounsaturated fat.
- 22. If you tend to have cold or rainy weather,** consider an indoor stationary bike. If you have an outdoor bike you don't use, a device called a wind trainer can convert it to a stationary bike.
- 23. Check the Nutrition Facts label on frozen dinners.** You want no more than 30 percent of calories from fat, 10 percent of calories from saturated fat and 200 mg of sodium for every 100 calories.
- 24. Wearing ankle weights while you walk is a great way to give your legs a workout.** But don't walk too far because they throw off your natural gait and can lead to injury.
- 25. Unrefined whole-grain foods have fiber to help lower blood cholesterol and help you feel full.**
- 26. Travel often?** Don't just sit and read or watch television while waiting for a flight. Stretch your legs, and get moving.
- 27. Using herbs and spices in your meals increases the flavor** without affecting diabetes control. But beware of herb blends that contain sodium and salt, such as lemon pepper and garlic salt.
- 28. If your blood sugars are low, don't eat chocolate.** It tastes good, but has a lot of fat, which your body absorbs more slowly. Choose a fat-free snack to get back to normal quicker.
- 29. Empty tennis ball cans are great for weights.** Just fill them up with sand and duct tape them. Voilà, instant dumbbells!
- 30. When you go out to eat, ask the waiter to leave chips, French fries or other high-fat side dishes off your plate.** Ask for vegetables or fruits instead.

Week One

Walking 101

The popularity of walking as a fitness activity has grown by leaps and bounds. Low-risk and easy to start, walking has proven its health benefits in numerous studies.

A regular walking program can:

- **Improve** your cholesterol profile
- **Boost** your bone strength
- **Lower** blood pressure
- **Prevent** weight gain
- **Increase** your energy and stamina

Experts at the American Heart Association recommend that every American adult engage in 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity just about every day of the week, at least 2½ hours per week. You can do that by walking two miles briskly (about four miles an hour). If this is too fast, choose a more comfortable pace.

Get Ready!

It's simple to start a walking program! All you need are comfortable clothes and supportive shoes. Layer loose clothing, keeping in mind that brisk exercise elevates the body's temperature. Shoes specifically designed for walking or running are best. Make sure you have a little wiggle room (½") between your longest toe and the end of your shoe. Avoid cotton socks since they retain moisture and can promote blisters.

Technique

- **Begin with short distances.** Start with a stroll that feels comfortable (perhaps 5–10 minutes) and gradually increase your time or distance each week by 10–20 percent (add just a few minutes or blocks). If it's easier on your joints and your schedule to take a couple of shorter walks (10–20 minutes) instead of one long walk (30–40 minutes) each day, do it!
- **Focus on posture.** Keep your head lifted, tummy pulled in and shoulders relaxed. Swing your arms naturally. Avoid carrying hand weights; they put excessive stress on the elbows and shoulders. Don't overstride. Select a comfortable, natural step length. If you want to move faster, pull your back leg through more quickly.
- **Breathe deeply.** If you can't talk or catch your breath while walking, slow down. Speed isn't important at first — just establish the walking habit.

Week One

Walking 101 *(continued)*

Intensity

To warm up, walk at an easy tempo for the first several minutes. Then gradually adopt a more purposeful pace. You can incorporate some brisk intervals to add variety. For example, walk one block fast, two blocks slow and repeat several times. Gradually add more fast intervals with shorter recovery periods. Concentrate on increasing your speed while maintaining good posture.

Walking hills is a great way to tone your legs. Using Nordic walking poles can boost the calorie-burning value of your walk while promoting good posture and overall muscle endurance. Treadmill walking is a good option during inclement weather.

The end of your walk is an ideal time to stretch since your body is warmed up. Stretch your hamstrings and calves (important walking muscles) as well as your chest, shoulders and back. Hold each stretch for 15–30 seconds.

Track your progress. Experts recommend that you walk at least 30 minutes a day. If walking is part of your weight-loss plan, more is better. Walking 60 minutes a day at brisk intervals will help you burn more calories. Fit walking into your schedule whenever you can. That may mean three 10-minute walks over the course of a day. The best schedule is one that keeps you walking and keeps you fit!

Safety

Listen to lively music while you walk to energize your workout. But if you wear headphones, keep the volume down and watch out for traffic.

Wear light colors or reflective clothing and carry a flashlight or glow stick if you walk when visibility is low so you can be seen.

Stick to sidewalks when you can, and choose streets with lower speed limits. Faster streets are riskier because motorists are less likely to see pedestrians and can't stop as quickly.

Know your area. Which businesses are open? Where are emergency telephones located? Walk on well-traveled streets rather than taking shortcuts in alleys or parking lots. Be calm and self-assured and walk purposefully to lower your chances of becoming a victim.

Two heads are better than one. Walking with a partner or in groups discourages crime and may help alert you to dangers such as speeding motorists or unleashed dogs.

If you have foot, knee, hip or back pain when walking, STOP and check with your doctor. You may need special exercises or better shoes. If you have osteoarthritis and have increased joint pain that lasts an hour or two after walking, consider another activity like stationary cycling or water exercise. Don't stop exercising altogether!



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Week Two

Fitting Fitness Into a Busy Schedule

By now you know that exercise is good for you, and that you should do something regularly, like walking. What's the best time to exercise? Anytime!

A healthy exercise program includes muscle strengthening, flexibility training and plenty of aerobic exercise such as walking.

Creative Scheduling

Even with a busy schedule, you can find creative ways to make time for walking. If you can fit in two 10-minute sessions during the day, it will benefit you almost as much as one 20-minute session. (Updated guidelines from the US Department of Health and Human Services [2008], the American Heart Association and American College of Sports Medicine [2007] state that moderate-intensity activity such as brisk walking can be performed in 10 minute bouts for improved health.) You just need to fit in a total of 2½ hours over the course of a week.

- **You can easily accomplish 10–15 minute sessions** by walking around the neighborhood after work, walking to a lunch spot that's 10 minutes away or heading to the corner store for a few items. Instead of seeking the closest spot, save time, frustration and gas by parking farther from your destination and using the time and energy to walk. Or, if you take the bus, get off a stop earlier and take a brisk walk.
- **To catch up with an old friend, schedule a walk together.** It's a great way to get some exercise and fresh air while you're enjoying each other's company. Chances are that you'll be so focused on the conversation that you'll walk farther than you planned.
- **Do you or your friend have a pet?** If so, volunteer to be the official dog walker and everyone will get more exercise — including the dog!
- **During the work day, take the long way to the copier or rest room.** Walk over to talk to someone instead of calling. Instead of a coffee break, take a 10-minute walk break! You'll burn a few extra calories and prevent stiffness.
- **Discuss business plans with colleagues while going for a short walk** instead of sitting at a desk. Develop a new corporate culture of "walking meetings."
- **On weekends, take a walk to reconnect with your family members.** If the kids want to go to the park or a friend's house, walk to get there.
- **Turn shopping into an aerobic activity.** Shopping is walking, so don't stop for 10 minutes straight and you've worked in one of your daily sessions! Check with your local mall for mall walker programs, and you'll have company.

Week Three

Setting Goals

How to set a SMART Goal

A great way to lose weight and get in shape is to set a specific goal. A SMART goal contains detailed information and a deadline. It can help you create an effective plan and stay motivated.

An example of a SMART goal might be: “I want to lose 15 pounds in three months so I can look good for my high school reunion.” You’ll want to break this big goal down into smaller goals that help you get there, focusing on activities and behaviors. For example, “To do this, I will walk during lunch at least 3–5 days a week and do at least one longer walk on the weekends. I will also reduce my daily calorie intake by 300 calories by eliminating one coffee beverage each day and by substituting a piece of fruit for my afternoon candy bar.”

Now let’s look at the components in the SMART acronym so you’ll know how to create goals that will help you get results.

“S” = Specific. In this example, losing 15 pounds is a specific goal. “Losing weight” or “getting in shape” are vague desires.

“M” = Measurable. A 15-pound weight loss is measurable on a scale. Body composition can also be measured by inches around your waist.

“A” = Attainable. Safe weight loss can be done at the rate of 1–2 lbs per week. In three months, it’s reasonable to lose 15 pounds if a person stays motivated.

“R” = Relevant. Looking good for a big event is a relevant and personal goal that can motivate a person to look better, feel better and have more energy, making the experience more enjoyable and rewarding. Preparing for a meaningful short-term event can get you on track for a lifestyle of healthier choices. For example, eating an extra piece of fruit each day can be the first step toward consuming more whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Once the event has passed, you’ll need to find other important reasons to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

“T” = Time Bound. There is an ending date when you will know that you have reached the goal. Then you can choose to set another goal or to just maintain your current weight.

If you think it, ink it!

Write down your goals and post them in a prominent place, e.g., on your computer, refrigerator or closet door. One way to stay on track is to keep a journal. Writing down the time, duration and speed of your walks keeps you accountable and helps you monitor progress. When your walking program is in full swing, you can look back through your early journal entries and see how far you’ve come. You can also keep a record of what you ate and drank to make sure you’re getting enough water and meeting your nutritional goals.

By reaching your daily goals, you’re on your way to achieving your long-term goal.

Week Four

Staying Motivated/Getting Back on Track

Are you finding it difficult to get out of bed in the morning for your daily walk? Or are you making up excuses to skip your lunchtime walk? Losing motivation, cutting workouts short and not having your old enthusiasm all are signs of a stale exercise regimen.

Quick Fix

Evaluate your routine to determine what's boring you. A new variation — such as a scenic new route — can reinvigorate a stale routine. If you've always walked indoors, logging miles on a treadmill or indoor track, move your workout outside for a change of scenery. Hike on trails; walk through a park or around a lake.

Good Company

Walking alone can provide solitude in a busy day, but maybe you need some company. Ask a friend to be your walking partner — you're much less likely to skip a workout if someone is waiting for you. Just about every sport or activity has a club; to find one, ask around at gyms or local community centers. Keeping up with the crowd also means that you'll be challenged to improve and take your walking workouts to a new level.

Challenge Yourself

Many exercisers walk simply to stay in shape, and most of the time that's just fine. But setting a goal, such as walking a 5k or 10k race (especially one that benefits a cause like fighting heart disease) will give your daily workouts more meaning. Start by incorporating bursts of speed into your walks. After a gentle warm-up, alternate a fast pace with a slower one for recovery. This can be as simple as speed walking to the next tree, or as structured as timed intervals on a track or walking up stadium steps.

Add Variety

Elite triathletes pioneered the concept of cross-training, and it works for the rest of us, too. If you usually focus on one activity, such as walking, substitute another a few days a week. Consider adding 1–2 days of strength training exercises to your routine. Ideally, any exercise program should include moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, muscle-strengthening exercise and flexibility. A certified personal trainer can help you if you haven't tried this type of workout approach before.

New Toys

Gadgets aren't necessary, but they can make your workouts more fun and more challenging. Pedometers, heart-rate monitors and iPods are just a few items to consider. Find out which new training gadgets are available for your favorite activity. Just buying new walking shoes or clothes can inspire you to get out and use them.

When you've gotten off track

When you've lapsed from exercise, identify where you went wrong. Was it illness, bad weather, travel or staying busy with a big project at work? Figure out what caused you to break your good habits and ways you can avoid this in the future. Then look at your schedule to see where you can fit in your daily walks. Even if you have limited time, try to fit a couple of 10–15 minute brisk walks in during the day. Remember, some exercise is far better than none, but try to get at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity.

Take a break

Sometimes you really do need time off. In that case, cut back or tweak your usual routine. You might even find a new twist that you enjoy more than your old standby. Once you've fought your first battle with boredom, you'll know the tricks to keep your workout from becoming too routine. Trying new routes, new challenges and new activities — and learning how to throw a little variety into your tried-and-true routine — can help you avoid the inclination to devise creative excuses for not exercising.

Week Five

Don't Forget to Stretch

Flexibility training can reduce stiffness and promote fluid movement during walking and other activities.

Stretching or range-of-motion exercises can be done just about anywhere, anytime, e.g., while you're at your desk, on the phone or while waiting in line. Minimize back and joint stiffness by getting up from the computer and stretching/moving frequently during the day. Television commercial breaks are perfect for a good set of stretches. Stretch to the point of mild tension and hold it for 10–30 seconds.

Basic Stretches



Hamstring Stretch: Prop one foot up on a low, secure bench or stairstep. Stand tall. Keeping your chest high, hips square and tailbone lifted, bend forward from your hips. Feel a stretch in the back of your thigh or knee. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.

Calf Stretch: Stand facing a wall with both hands on it. Position one foot forward (knee bent) and the other leg back with the leg straight, toes pointing at the wall. With your stomach tight, lean in toward the wall until you feel a stretch in the lower part of the back leg. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.



Additional Stretches



Hip Flexor Stretch: Lunge forward with one leg, knee bent. The back leg can stay straight or bend slightly. Push your hips forward until you feel a stretch in front of your back thigh near the groin. Keep your torso upright and your front knee behind your toes. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.

Adductor (inner thigh) stretch: Keeping your torso upright, lunge to one side with a bent knee over the toe. Keep your other leg straight. Push your weight to the “bent knee” side until you feel a stretch in the inner thigh of your straight leg. Hold 20–30 seconds on each leg.



Chest stretch: Place your fingertips lightly on the back of your head. Push your elbows back while squeezing with your upper back until you feel a stretch in your chest near your underarms. Hold for 20–30 seconds.

Another option is to stand in a corner with one hand or elbow on each wall. Your feet should be 1½–2 feet away from the corner in a split stance.

Keeping your back straight and tummy pulled in, lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in your chest near your underarms. Hold for 20–30 seconds.



(Feet position should be staggered, one foot in front and the other in back.)

Week Five

Don't Forget to Stretch *(continued)*



Shoulder Rolls: Lift your shoulders up toward your ears, then down and backwards in a circular motion. Repeat 5–10 times. Perform with both shoulders simultaneously or alternate right and left.

Is one time better than another to exercise?

It's really up to you. You can walk in the morning, afternoon or evening. Consider your personal schedule and energy level. Lunch breaks are a good time to get out of the office and exercise. Use your coffee break to take a short walk around the office. Get rid of the day's stress by fitting in a quick walk after work.

Whatever time you choose, make sure you stick with it. For some people, it's easier to stay with an exercise program when you do it with a friend or co-worker.

Make time to stay healthy. Exercise is one of the best things you can do for yourself, so don't put it off for another day. Just a few small changes can lead to big results if you stay consistent. You'll be glad you did.

Week Six

Eat Well to Stay Motivated and Energized

Do you have trouble going for a walk at noon or after work, even though you're truly committed to your program and it's the only time you have to work out? Or do you feel so exhausted that you just can't get going? Your diet may be the problem.

If you tend to skip meals to save calories, you may be robbing yourself of important fuel for exercise. While skipping meals may temporarily make your stomach feel flatter, it can also leave you feeling tired, irritable and unfocused. Then you'll be tempted to forego your noontime walk, or go home, eat and stretch out on the couch in front of the TV after work.

Follow some simple, sensible dietary practices that will help motivate you to walk. You'll feel energized and refreshed!

Stay with feel-good foods

To help stay motivated, keep the amount of sugar in your blood (and thus, your energy level) stable by eating five to six small meals throughout the day. They should be composed of complex carbohydrates such as whole-grain breads, beans and other vegetables, whole-grain crackers and fruit. These foods help keep your blood sugar stable because they are digested and absorbed slowly into the blood and don't require your pancreas to produce much insulin.

Refined carbohydrates, such as potato chips, doughnuts and cookies, are absorbed very quickly and trigger the pancreas to produce large amounts of insulin. So, while they may give you an initial boost, your energy will drop off quickly, and your mood will follow. They also pack on extra calories with little nutritional value.

Many people rely on caffeine for the initial kick it can provide. But caffeine can also affect the amount of insulin, and thus sugar, in your blood. This can zap your energy over the course of a day, so limit the amount of coffee, tea and soda that you drink.

Handle your snack attack

If you plan ahead and make time for grocery shopping, you can easily pack some simple meals and snacks to take to work with you.

Here are some healthy snacks that you can keep in your desk drawer at work:

- **Box of raisins**
- **Handful of unsalted nuts (Nuts are high in calories and fats; eat in moderation.)**
- **Fruits such as a banana, grapes or an apple**
- **Granola bars (check the calories)**
- **Carrot sticks**
- **Light yogurt**
- **Wheat crackers (low-fat or fat-free) plus reduced-fat peanut butter (unsalted)**
- **Dried fruit**
- **Animal crackers**
- **Fig bars**
- **Graham crackers**



My Heart. My Life.

Week Six

Eat Well to Stay Motivated and Energized

(continued)

Here are some quick options if you're near a kitchen:

- **Instant oatmeal**
- **Popcorn (air popped or cooked in small amounts of vegetable oil without butter and salt)**
- **Cereal and milk (fat free, 1% fat milk)**
- **Frozen fruit bars**
- **Pita (or vegetables) with hummus**
- **Applesauce**
- **Tomato/vegetable/bean soup (reduced sodium)**
- **Chocolate milk (fat free, 1% fat)**
- **Baked tortilla chips with salsa**
- **Low-fat, unsalted cottage cheese—alone or with fruit**

Experiment to find the right combination of food and drink to energize your workout. It depends on your individual taste and your metabolism. With patience, an open mind and a little creativity, you'll find which foods suit you best.

For recipes, tips and lessons on heart-healthy cooking, visit: heart.org/simplecooking