



BOBO GAZETTE

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LETTER FROM EDITOR

February is Heart Health Month

It is important we take care of our hearts.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. One in five deaths is due to heart disease, even though the disease is largely preventable.

We have put together some educational articles from the National Institute of Health for this Newsletter and we hope are helpful to you.

P.S. Don't let anyone break your heart!

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Are You Heart Smart?

What to Know for a Healthier Heart

Keeping your heart healthy starts with living a heart-healthy lifestyle. But first, you need to get smart about your heart. Knowing what causes heart disease, what puts you at risk for it, and how you can reduce those risks can help you make informed decisions to protect your heart and keep it strong.

Want to test your knowledge? Take this short Heart Smart Quiz:

Heart Smart Quiz

1. True or False? High blood pressure is also known as hypertension and occurs when your blood pressure is consistently 130/80 mm Hg or higher.

2. True or False? Your body mass index, or BMI, shows if your weight is in a healthy range for your height and is one measure of your future risk for heart disease.

3. True or False? Cholesterol helps make hormones, vitamin D, and substances to help you digest foods. Your body needs it for good health, but in the right amounts.

4. True or False? Eating lots of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, using fat-free or low-fat dairy products, and limiting foods high in saturated fat or sugar-sweetened beverages are all part of a heart-healthy diet.

5. True or False? Not getting enough sleep or getting poor quality sleep on a regular basis increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions.

6. True or False? To strengthen their heart, adults should aim to get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity such as brisk walking each week..*Answer Key*

: All answers are True.



Healthy Eating for a Happy Heart

When stress hits hard like it has during the pandemic, many of us eat more, and less-than-healthy comfort foods may be the treats we reach for first. But an unhealthy response to stress can be hard on your body, especially your heart. That's why it's smart – at the top of the New Year, or anytime – to try to eat more foods that nourish. It'll make your heart happier, and maybe trim your waistline, too.

There us the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, or DASH for short," said Charlotte Pratt, Ph.D., M.S., R.D., a nutrition expert at NHLBI. For years, the [DASH eating plan](#) has ranked among the U.S. News & World Reports' best diets for healthy living and heart health. It's secret, said Pratt: "Eating nutrient-dense foods and meals that are lower in sodium and saturated fat, rich in fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and legumes."

"The DASH eating plan is scientifically proven to lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels," said Pratt. And NHLBI research shows that increasing your physical activity and watching your calories while following DASH will also help you lose weight.

- Eat vegetables, fruits and whole grains,
- Include fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans, nuts and vegetable oils,

Limit foods that are high in saturated fat, such as fatty meats, full-fat dairy foods and tropical oils such as coconut, palm kernel and palm oils; and •

- Limit sugar sweetened drinks and desserts.

These tips can help:

- Change gradually. Add one more serving of vegetables a day. Read nutrition labels

to choose the food lowest in saturated fat, sodium or salt and added sugar.

- Vary foods high in proteins. Try a mix of lean cuts of meat. Remove the skin from chicken. Eat fish once or twice a week. Eat two or more meals without meat each week.
- Select healthy, tasty snacks. Have a piece of fruit, a few unsalted snacks such as rice cakes, fat-free or low-fat yogurt or raw vegetables with a low-fat dip.
- Find substitutes. Try whole-wheat bread or brown rice instead of white bread or white rice. Try beans or seeds such as flax or sunflower seeds, if you're allergic to nuts.

Reduce Stress for a Healthier Heart

Whether it's from everyday deadlines, financial struggles, or the COVID-19 pandemic, stress shows up often in life. And your body reacts to it: your heart rate increases, your blood vessels narrow—and over time, these little blows can add up and do damage to your health, particularly your heart. With chronic stress, you're more likely to have high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and poor sleep. Even other parts of your body – from your lungs to your gut – can take a hit.

But while you can't always limit the amount of stress in your life, you can work on changing how you respond to it. Just like the automatic "fight or flight" response that kicks in when you're scared – your muscles tense, heart rate increases, and brain becomes more alert – your body also has a built-in, healthy relaxation response. When that's triggered, the opposite happens: your breathing and heart rate slow down, and your blood pressure decreases.

Luckily, with practice, you can learn to trigger that response. Try these techniques on your own or find a teacher or class to help you get started. Don't get discouraged if you don't get the hang of it quickly. And if one approach doesn't work for you, try something new. You can learn to de-stress in lots of other ways.

Meditation. One of the most studied approaches for managing stress, this involves developing your ability to stay focused on the present, instead of worrying about the past or future. Find a quiet location with as few distractions as possible. Get comfortable by either sitting, lying or walking. Focus your attention on a specific word or set of words, an object or your breathing. And let distractions, including thoughts, come and go without judgment.

Progressive muscle relaxation. To feel the effect, first tense your muscles for a few seconds, then relax them. Start by tensing and relaxing your toes, then your calves and on up to your face. Do one muscle group at a time.



Deep breathing. Take in a slow, deep breath, let your stomach or chest expand and then exhale slowly. Repeat a few times. Many people don't breathe deeply, but it is relaxing and something you can do anytime, anywhere.

Guided imagery. This involves a series of steps that include relaxing and visualizing the

details of a calm, peaceful setting, such as a garden.

Getting your mind and body to a place of calm doesn't always mean being still, however. Other healthy ways to manage stress include taking a yoga or tai chi class, talking to a professional counselor, joining a stress management program or an art class, or meeting up with friends for a brisk walk. Being in nature can be very soothing for some people.

Combining de-stressors like these with other healthy habits can go a long way toward strengthening your heart. Eat more veggies, fruits and whole grains, and less sodium, sugar and saturated fats, for example. Move your body more – like through dancing and walking meetings. Find exercises you actually love and do them regularly. Get enough good, quality sleep. And develop a strong social support system. Then rethink some of the familiar ways you may be coping with stress, such as drinking alcohol frequently, using drugs and other substances, smoking or overeating. They can actually worsen your stress – and your health.

Taking care of your heart health is a lifelong journey, but at a time when the risk of severe illness from COVID-19 remains higher in people with poor cardiovascular health, learning new ways to make your heart strong has become even more important.

Learn how to stress less for a healthier heart and more about heart health from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute by visiting www.nhlbi.nih.gov. If you need help finding additional resources to help you cope with stress, talk to a healthcare provider. Seek urgent care if you can't cope at all or have suicidal thoughts. Resources are also available at nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help.