

Your keys to improving your heart's health

By Travis Loy

Your heart pumps about 5.2 quarts of blood throughout your body. This is an amazing feat for an organ the size of your fist. Unfortunately, human beings have adopted habits that hinder this little organ's efficiency and cripple its lifespan. I hope this article empowers you by putting the keys to a long heart-healthy life in your hands.

You are what you eat

Your diet should include fruits such as apples and tomatoes, green vegetables like spinach and kale, high-fiber foods such as beans and sweet potatoes, unsaturated fats such as olive oil and avocados, and Omega 3 fats found in fish, walnuts, flax seeds and chia seeds. Avoid added fats and cholesterol like cheese, dressings and sauces where you can. I tell my patients that they can and should enjoy their meat, but to limit pork, dark meat poultry or red meat to one or two high-quality meals a week.

Quit smoking

Chemicals in tobacco smoke damage the vessels of the heart. I have found tobacco to be the hardest addiction for my patients to kick, but those who succeed see major health benefits just a few short months after their last cigarette. If you are looking to quit, ask your doctor about resources in your community such as addiction counseling, support groups and nicotine replacement options. Think of the money you can save! The average yearly cost of smoking a pack a day adds up to about \$2,900.

Alcohol in moderation

Alcohol is toxic to heart cells. Heart failure, a condition where one's heart fails to pump blood to the body, is common in people who are addicted to alcohol. The recommended maximum daily alcohol consumption level is under continued debate, but for now, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises no more than two alcoholic beverages a day for men and no more than one drink a day for women. Pregnant women should abstain from alcohol entirely.

Weight management

Weight loss is incredibly challenging to do alone so I advise meeting with your doctor to discuss your options. There may be health concerns you should address before training for that 5K. RiverStone Health Clinic patients have the option of participating in our medical weight management program. It focuses on the entire individual with health professionals guiding the patient to better nutrition, activity levels and appropriate healthcare.

Visit your doctor

Sometimes, no matter what we do, it feels like the cards are stacked against us. Some of us are born into families where everyone has unhealthy habits and chronic illnesses. Doctors devote our lives to helping

our patients break the cycle of heart disease. New medications and techniques are being developed for improving the health and lives of our patients. If you feel overwhelmed by health concerns, such as being overweight, I highly advise you to meet with your doctor. Your doctor will partner with you to help you make your heart health goals a reality.

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