

## HEALTHY HEART FOR LIFE: AVOIDING HEART DISEASE

**I'd like to improve my heart health, but I'm worried I don't have the motivation to join a gym or make big diet changes. Any advice?**

Answers from Francisco Lopez-Jimenez, M.D.

It's great that you want to improve your heart health. Don't think that you have to make big changes to have an effect on your heart health, though. Even small, basic steps can have dramatic effects.

One of the biggest drops in heart disease risk occurs when you go from living a sedentary lifestyle to being active for as little as one hour a week. Obviously, the more active you are, the better. But just one full hour of activity over the course of a week makes a difference.

Health professionals at Mayo Clinic have developed the Mayo Clinic Healthy Heart Plan. The entire plan is contained in the book "Mayo Clinic Healthy Heart for Life!" But one of the key messages is that even little steps may make a big difference.

Some of these steps for getting started are included in the "Eat 5, Move 10, Sleep 8" section of the book, which describes a two-week quick start to the Mayo Clinic Healthy Heart Plan. Here's a summary of the Mayo Clinic Healthy Heart Plan's quick start:

- **Eat 5.** Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day to boost your heart health. Start by eating breakfast and including at least one serving of fruit or vegetable. Snack on vegetables or fruits in between meals. Make a conscious effort to include fruits and vegetables in your daily meals. Don't worry so much about foods you shouldn't eat — just work on getting five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- **Move 10.** Add at least 10 minutes of moderately intense physical activity to what you do every day. Sure government recommendations say to include physical activity for 30 minutes or more a day, but the bottom line is even 10 minutes makes a difference.

For example, studies have found just 60 to 90 minutes a week of physical activity can reduce your heart disease risk by up to 50 percent. That's a big benefit from a pretty small commitment on your part. It doesn't have to be elaborate — take the stairs, take a walk, just get moving. As you become more active, you can try to increase your total amount of activity each day.

- **Sleep 8.** Quality sleep is good for your heart. It can be a challenge to make time for good sleep, but it's important. For two weeks try to get eight hours of good, quality sleep each night. Yes, each person's sleep needs vary slightly, but eight is a good number to shoot for.



All of these tips from the "Eat 5, Move 10, Sleep 8" section of the book are meant to be tried for two weeks before you move on to a more established heart-healthy plan. But there's nothing wrong with continuing this quick start for longer periods. Consider trying other reputable diet and exercise plans offered by the American Heart Association and government agencies. The point is to get started with something and keep at it.