

# GET YOUR HEALTHY game day on

The excitement of football, and even the activities and feelings of anticipation leading up to games, can be unhealthy in ways many do not realize, according to Jody Gilchrist, a cardiac nurse practitioner at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Critical matchups, tight games, and crushing defeats can trigger adrenaline that reduces blood flow to the heart and other muscles and increases heart rate and blood pressure. Over time, these high levels of stress hormones can hurt your heart—even though a football game may be deemed good stress.

Adding to the effects of stress on the body would be healthier foods at the tailgate party, and heavier eating and drinking during the game. Not a winning combination.

Here are some tailgating tips:

- Help minimize stress by watching the game with people you enjoy.
  - Knock out a few pushups and sit ups during commercial breaks.
  - Chew gum or squeeze a stress ball to reduce anxiety and control your emotions.
  - Take a brief walk at halftime, or if you are attending the game, take a walk around the stadium or to another section to meet a friend.
  - Manage your net dietary intake by planning ahead and making healthier choices at other times of the day in anticipation of splurging a bit during the game.
- If tailgating at the stadium, try to conserve calories earlier in the day.
  - If tailgating at home, consider using vegetables in place of chips for dips, and substitute Greek yogurt for sour cream or cream cheese dips.
  - Because sodium causes fluid retention—something especially bad for heart patients—a good rule of thumb is to avoid foods that have more than 1 mg of sodium per calorie. At about 0.5 mg of sodium per calorie, natural foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables generally contain much less, so opt for them whenever possible.
  - Do your best to avoid soft drinks, which are extremely high in sugar.

In the end, your health will win—even if your team does not.