

Self-Care Corner

Pump up your heart in 5 easy steps

Did you know that a good night's sleep can help prevent heart disease? That's just one way to lower your risk. Dr. Holly Andersen, director of education and outreach at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center, offers some easy steps to improve heart health and overall well-being:

Step 1: Know your numbers.

Your blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels are the most important numbers you will need to know before you take the path to good heart health. A normal blood pressure level is 140/85 or lower, total cholesterol levels should be less than 200, and triglycerides less than 150.

Step 2: Start walking.

Exercise really is the fountain of youth. A simple 20- to 30-minute walk a few days a week can actually cut your risk of premature death by more than half. Physical activity also improves sleep, reduces stress, elevates mood, reduces blood pressure, improves cholesterol, improves brain health, and prevents memory loss.

Step 3: Laugh out loud.

Laughter is good medicine. Just 15 minutes of laughter is about equal to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise with respect to our heart health. So choose funny movies on Netflix. Laughter has also been linked to the healthy function of blood vessels, an increase in the brain hormones that improve mood, and reduction of pain and anxiety.

Step 4: Focus on your waistline, not your weight.

Your waistline is a better measurement of your overall health than your weight because the amount of fat around your waistline is directly linked to high blood pressure and high cholesterol and can place you at increased risk for diabetes. Anything you can do to make your waistline smaller is definitely a step in the right direction. Liposuction doesn't count!

Step 5: Get a good night's sleep.

Sleep is one of the most undervalued elements of our daily routines, but it is absolutely vital to good health. Lack of sleep increases your blood pressure, induces stress, increases your appetite and slows down your metabolism, dampens your mood and decreases your brain power.

