



## Protect your heart

Your heart never gets a day off. These five essentials will keep it ticking strong for decades to come.

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN

What is the best way to protect yourself from heart disease?

**H**EART disease is a problem that few people can say they have no concerns about. Most people either know someone with heart disease or they themselves have heart disease. So, what's the best way to protect ourselves from this problem?

All of my patients know how important I think diet is to our overall health. This is one of five factors to focus on for your heart to continue to beat in a healthy, hearty fashion. Let's start with the basics:

1. Get quality sleep, rest and relaxation.
2. Make sure to eat healthy fats and vegetables.
3. Keep your body moving daily—yes, daily.
4. Boost your mood, keep yourself smiling.
5. Avoid processed foods.

Even though these seem like very basic things that everyone knows about, I find that most people are not making a conscious effort to ensure these factors are met every day. When we get busy, some of these fall by the wayside.

Sleep is the time when our body heals and repairs itself. If you short change yourself in the area of sleep and relaxation, your overworked and overstressed body will rebel in the form of many health issues. Your heart is not immune to stress, so make sure to

make time to rest and relax.

Your diet is the foundation of your health. If you eat healthy fats like those found in nuts, fish, avocados and olive oil, you'll help your body run with less inflammation and more efficiency. Also, eating vegetables in all colours of the rainbow will help you fill up on vitamins, minerals and antioxidants to help your heart run at its best.

Daily exercise doesn't mean you have to go to a gym every day. It just means that you should keep your body moving daily. Even when you are working, you can walk to your colleague's desk to ask questions instead of just shooting off an email. You can take the stairs at work instead of taking the elevator. Parking farther away in the parking lot can help too. Take your lunch break outside for a noon time walk with co-workers. It'll get you energized for your afternoon as well as keeping your heart ticking along healthily.

Many people aren't aware that depression and other mood issues can affect your heart health as well. If you are having issues, talk to



your doctor and get help. Allowing these to fester and wear down your mind and body is not the way to go. Social support is helpful, so spending time with your loved ones or checking in with a therapist might help. If you are an animal person, some studies suggest that pets help with moods.

Finally, processed foods erode our health in many ways. Next time you see a commercial for junk food, just say NO. I always tell patients to stock their cupboards and fridge with only healthy options so that if you are tempted, you only have healthy options to choose from. The chemicals, dyes and sugars in processed foods cause inflammation and are typically high in fats and sugars, neither of which is good for your heart. Remember, your health depends on eating the right things and also on NOT eating the wrong things.

If you pay attention to these fundamental principles, your health will be better in more than just one organ system. Remember to check in with your doctor for your annual physical to make sure your entire body, including your heart, is functioning at its optimum. **Z**

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