



TIPS

for a Heart-Healthy Lifestyle

Keeping your heart healthy and having good circulation are the keys to heart attack and stroke prevention. And the key to a heart-healthy lifestyle is balancing calorie intake and exercise. It's never too late to start making health-conscious choices in your diet and exercise that could help reduce your risk of a first-time or recurrent heart attack or stroke. Here are some tips that you may want to adopt or discuss with your physician.

- ❑ **Lose weight.** Being overweight or obese, especially if you tend to gain weight around your waist rather than in your hips or thighs, is a significant risk factor for heart attack and stroke. If you are overweight or obese, reducing your weight with diet and exercise can have many health benefits.
- ❑ **Know your numbers.** In addition to your weight, it is important to know and monitor your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes are significant risk factors for heart attack and stroke. For some people, these levels can be managed with diet and exercise; others may require medication to control these risk factors.
- ❑ **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise will help lower your blood pressure, reduce your weight, and boost your energy level. At least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise on most days is recommended. If that seems beyond your current limits, try breaking it up into several 10-minute exercise sessions per day. This will gradually build your exercise tolerance.
- ❑ **Make healthy food choices.** Opt for low-fat alternatives to high-fat meals; avoid refined and high-

sugar foods; and eat more whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Read the nutrition labels on foods, and make smart choices. Avoid foods high in sugar, sodium, saturated fat, and trans fat.

- ❑ **Stop smoking.** Cigarette smoking greatly increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. If you currently don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, quitting can lower your risk. If you're having trouble quitting, ask your doctor about treatment options that can help you quit. It is never too late to quit smoking.
- ❑ **Reduce salt intake.** Limiting salt or sodium in your diet can lower your blood pressure, which, in turn, lowers your risk of heart attack and stroke. The US Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends less than 2,300 mg per day for most people and 1,500 mg per day for those older than 50 or who have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease.
- ❑ **Drink alcohol in moderation.** Moderate alcohol use (two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women) may actually help protect against heart attack and stroke. But alcohol use above those levels may increase your blood pressure and raise your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Tips for Patients are available for download at www.neurologyreviews.com.