

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

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Hi Everyone!

One of the many good reasons to exercise is to maintain heart health. Your heart beats more than 100,000 times a day and pumps over 8,000 litres of blood. It never rests – it just keeps going and going 24/7, 365 days a year! So what can you do to look after your heart?

Know Your Cholesterol Level

Do you know your cholesterol level? A high level of LDL cholesterol (low density lipoproteins) in the blood is strongly associated with increased risk of heart disease. While a high level of HDL cholesterol gives some protection against heart disease. LDL cholesterol can stick to the walls of your arteries forming plaque which leads to narrowing and hardening of the arteries. The main dietary factor that increases blood LDL cholesterol is 'saturated' fat. This is the fat found in foods such as full-fat dairy products, fatty meats, biscuits, pies, pastries and fried takeaways. LDL cholesterol can be reduced by restricting intake of these foods and by replacing full-fat dairy foods with low/reduced-fat alternatives.

Know your Blood Pressure

Elevated blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease. This should be checked by your GP on a regular basis. If you have high blood pressure, you may need medication to bring it under control before commencing an exercise program.

Eat Plenty of Fruits and Vegetables

Eat plenty of foods of plant origin such as fruit and vegetables (including legumes). Fruit and vegetables are thought to protect LDL cholesterol from 'oxidation'. Oxidation is a chemical reaction believed to make LDL cholesterol far more likely to promote heart disease. Fruit and vegetables, together with bread, rice, preferably whole grain pasta and unprocessed breakfast cereals are beneficial to general well being, including heart health.

Maintain Healthy Body Weight

Being overweight puts you at higher risk of developing heart disease and also type II diabetes. Maintaining optimal body weight will have beneficial effects on your blood cholesterol and general health and fitness.

Get Regular Cardio Vascular Exercise

Engaging in physical activity will have beneficial effects on your blood cholesterol. Vigorous exercise increases the helpful HDL cholesterol while reducing the harmful LDL cholesterol. Try and get some aerobic exercise each day, a brisk 30 minute walk may be all that is needed. This will increase your heart rate therefore exercising the heart and making it stronger and more efficient in the long term.

Drink Alcohol in Moderation

If you drink alcohol, a low or moderate intake of alcoholic beverages (particularly wine) apparently reduces the risk of heart disease through increasing HDL cholesterol. However the key word is **moderation**. No more than 28 standard drinks per week for men and 14 for women. No more than 6 standard drinks in a day for men and no more than 4 for women. Try to have 1 or 2 alcohol free days per week. Alcohol consumption beyond the recommended amount could undo all the good work, causing high blood pressure and liver disease.

Don't Smoke

Smoking greatly increases the risk of heart disease. If you are a smoker, give up now! It's never too late.

Yours in health,

Jeni