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*If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?*

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## Seven easy ways to reduce heart disease risk and be heart-healthy

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It's no secret that heart disease is the leading cause of death for adult men and women in this country. It kills one of every four people. While many of us associate February with red-ruffled hearts and chocolate candy for Valentine's Day, it's also "American Heart Month" to raise awareness of the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices to improve overall heart health.

"There's no better time to focus on heart disease and kick-start your New Year's resolution to lose weight, eat better and start exercising," says Dr. Ravi Dave, director of the Cardiac Catheterization Lab at UCLA Medical Center, Santa Monica.

The American Heart Association recommends seven easy ways to reduce your risk for heart disease and be heart-healthy. The AHA calls them, "Life's Simple 7," because they are easy to understand and can be followed by anyone at any age. They are:

- Get active. Daily physical activity can help you live longer with a better quality of life. Walking or exercising in other ways for at least 30 minutes five times per week will reduce your risk for heart disease, diabetes and stroke.
- Control cholesterol. "Lowering and controlling blood-cholesterol levels will help prevent buildup in your arteries and reduce your risk of blockages that can lead to heart attacks and strokes," says Dave.
- Eat better. You've heard it before, but it's worth repeating: a low-fat, high-fiber diet consisting of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fish and other lean proteins forms the basis for a heart-healthy lifestyle.
- Manage blood pressure. High blood pressure is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. By keeping it within recommended ranges through exercise, medication or a combination of both, you can prevent additional wear and tear on your heart and other organs.
- Lose weight. "Carrying too much weight, especially around your mid-section, puts you at higher risk for high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol, known risk factors for heart disease," explains Dave. "Even modest weight loss reduces your risk of these health issues."
- Reduce blood sugar. Most of what you eat gets converted into glucose - blood sugar - that fuels your body with energy. However, when blood-sugar levels become too high, you are at risk for diabetes. Although diabetes can be managed, it greatly increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. Reducing blood-sugar levels through diet and exercise also reduces your heart-disease risk.
- Stop smoking. Stop smoking. "It's the single best thing you can do for your heart - and your overall health," says Dave. He suggests talking to your doctor about new treatments to help you quit for good.

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Source:

UCLA Health

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