



WELLBEING

Good Beats

It may beat faster for that special someone, but your heart also does a great job of keeping you fit and well. Show it some TLC this Valentine's Day (and beyond) with our top tips

Around 14 February every year we tend to think of our heart as something that can be filled with joy and love by another. But the best things you can do for your heart health require just one person – and that's you. With one British adult dying of heart disease every three minutes, it is essential to keep your heart working in tip-top condition. Start making these lifestyle changes today and by next Valentine's Day – whatever the state of your love life – your heart will be in better shape than ever.

GET MOVING

You do not need to join a gym or sign up for the latest designer yoga class to have a healthy heart – you just need to stay active. Regular physical activity is the most effective way to increase the amount of calories your body uses. Walking an extra three miles a day, for example, adds about

300 calories to your total daily energy expenditure or your metabolic rate. Plus, exercise helps you burn fat and develop lean muscle, which in turn burns about 70 times more calories than fat. Cardiovascular exercise will get your heart pumping and can elevate your metabolic rate – both during your workout and for hours afterwards.

DON'T DIET

Fad and deprivation diets may create a calorie deficit in the short term, but they are also likely to set you on a cycle of yo-yo dieting that is proven to lower your muscle mass and cause long-term health problems. Instead, if you need to lose weight try to eat small meals regularly throughout the day as the more times your digestive system gets to work, the more calories you burn. When planning meals, remember the

following: plant-based proteins such as beans and nuts, and lean animal protein such as fish and chicken will all help you build muscle; whole grains contain fibre needed to fill you up and stabilise blood sugar; and fruits and vegetables have antioxidants to reduce inflammation, which is now thought to be a major cause of heart disease.

SEE HOW YOU MEASURE UP

High blood pressure (hypertension) is a major risk factor for heart disease and the only way to know whether you have it is to get it checked. Each of us has different blood pressure and this is affected by lots of factors, including diet, being overweight, lack of exercise and smoking. Your blood pressure can go up and down throughout the day, however the recognised maximum levels for healthy blood pressure are systolic

140mmHg and diastolic 90mmHg. These two figures show the pressure of your blood when your heart beats (systolic) and when it rests (diastolic), so it is important that both are measured. It's a quick and simple test that could save your life. And if you are found to have high blood pressure then do not panic as certain lifestyle changes like taking more exercise, losing weight and cutting down on alcohol, salt and caffeine can make a big difference.

TACKLE STRESS

Whether it's meditation, exercise, social activities or a hobby, a regular stress-relief method can help you stay focused, sleep better and reduce your production of stress hormones that can negatively affect the way your metabolism functions and the way your body stores fat. Relaxation techniques, from meditation to yoga, gardening, going for a long walk, reading a book and even stroking your cat or dog, have also been proven to lower your blood pressure.

TRY CHERRY AID

Cherries contain powerful antioxidant pigments called anthocyanins. The darker the colour, the better they are for you, as these pigments are what give edible plants their rich colouring. But while all dark purple fruits and vegetables are good for you, in addition cherries are extremely high in potassium, which regulates heart rate and blood pressure, reducing the risk of hypertension and stroke, while promoting optimum functioning of the heart and kidneys. They also contain phytosterols, also known as plant sterols, which help to reduce 'bad' cholesterol levels (LDL).

STOP SMOKING

You will not want to hear this if you are addicted to nicotine, but smoking is the single most



damaging thing you can do to your health. It directly impacts your heart, starving it of oxygen and contributing to cholesterol and plaque build-up in your arteries, which can lead to blood clots and heart disease. Research shows that smokers who try to give up with the help of nicotine replacement therapy stand a better chance of quitting long-term, so see your GP and ask for help. Your heart will thank you for it.

applies whether you drink every day, once a week or occasionally. Most people do not drink alcohol every day, but if you do, try having some days off – aim for at least two alcohol-free days a week. Just make sure you do not increase the amount you drink on the other days.

• For more information on heart health, visit the British Heart Foundation website at bhf.org.uk

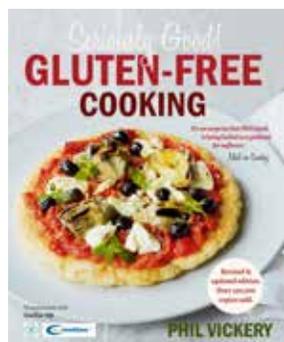
MAKE EVERY DAY D-DAY

If you take just one supplement for heart health, make sure it is vitamin D. As a nation, the UK is deprived of year-round sunshine and in winter we can become deficient in vitamin D, which is synthesised in the skin on sunny days. A lack of vitamin D has been directly linked to many immune problems as well as osteoporosis and brittle bones, and it has also recently been linked to heart health. Keep your levels topped up year-round with a daily spray of an oral vitamin D supplement. Try BetterYou D Lux 1000, £6.95.

DITCH THE DRINK

Drinking more than the recommended amount of alcohol can have a harmful effect on your heart, causing abnormal heart rhythms, high blood pressure, damage to your heart muscle and other diseases such as stroke, liver problems and some cancers. Alcohol is also high in calories, so it can lead to weight gain, and it lowers your inhibitions, which might mean you find it harder to stick to your healthy eating plan when you have been drinking. So if you are trying to lose weight, cut down on alcohol. Be aware, too, that the guidelines on alcohol consumption for men have recently been changed, bringing them in line with those for women. For both sexes, it is now recommended that you do not regularly drink more than 2-3 units of alcohol a day. This

HEALTH NOTES



➤ **No grain, no pain** In response to a huge demand for new recipes, information and advice, chef Phil Vickery has updated his best-selling book *Seriously Good! Gluten-Free Cooking*, £16.99. Published in conjunction with Coeliac UK, the new recipes feature everything from chestnut bread to birthday cake.



➤ **Style watch** If you want a workout watch that looks like a stylish everyday timepiece, then try Huawei, a classic design with embedded smart technology. Available in a number of styles, features include fitness tracking, a barometer and a heart rate monitor that syncs to Android and iOS phones. Huawei Watch with leather band, £329. Visit consumer.huawei.com.



➤ **Tweet dreams** Do you share your health concerns on social media? If so, you are not alone. According to Twitter, there are 50,000 tweets a day about stress – with health issues such as weight, sleep and depression common triggers. Ironically, research shows that time spent away from our gadgets and out in the open air is the easiest way to combat depression, encourage sleep and burn calories.