5 Ways to Keep Your Heart Healthy

Your heart is a strong muscle. It is about the size of your fist. Like the engine in a car, the heart keeps your body going. When people don’t take care of their hearts, they can develop heart disease. Here are five ways to keep your heart healthy.

1. **Keep a healthy blood pressure**
   A healthy blood pressure reading is below 120/80. Blood pressures have 2 numbers, the bottom number and the top number. Blood pressure is too high if the reading is 140/90 or higher. Have your doctor take your blood pressure at each visit.

2. **Keep track of your cholesterol**
   Doctors look for three things when they take a cholesterol reading:
   - Total cholesterol. A reading under 200 is best.
   - HDL (good cholesterol). A good HDL reading is over 60 mg/dL. A poor reading for men is less than 40 mg/dL and for women it is less than 50 mg/dL.
   - LDL (bad cholesterol). Your LDL should be less than 100 mg/dL

3. **Eat a heart healthy diet**
   - Don’t eat trans-fats and solid fats like butter, margarine and shortening. Instead, use canola and olive oil.
   - Choose protein that is low-fat. Eat lean meat, poultry and fish. Choose skim milk and chicken breasts with no skin.
   - Eat more fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables.
   - Select whole grains like whole wheat flour, brown rice and whole grain pasta.
   - Use less salt. Frozen dinners, soups and other packaged food are made with a lot of salt.

4. **Exercise regularly**
   Keep your heart muscle strong by exercising. Regular exercise helps lower blood pressure, may reduce stress, may increase good cholesterol and controls your weight. Walking is a great way to start an exercise program. Check with your doctor before you start.

5. **Live a healthy lifestyle**
   - **Do not smoke.** Avoid second hand smoke. Smoking greatly increases your chance of developing heart disease.
   - Don’t drink alcohol or drink less.
   - Keep a healthy weight.