

Health Insights

February 2024

Improving Heart Health

Cardiovascular disease, which refers to all diseases of the heart and circulation, is the number one cause of mortality around the world. In 2021, it was responsible for one in three deaths (20.5m), with coronary heart disease alone as the single biggest killer. Since 1997, the number of people living with cardiovascular disease across the world has doubled and is projected to rise further.

Researchers identified a hierarchy of behaviors that make up a typical 24-hour day ranked by how much each type benefits heart health in comparison to sedentary periods. Time spent engaged in moderately vigorous activities provided the greatest benefit, followed by light activity, standing, and sleeping.

The team modeled what would happen if an individual changed the amounts of one behavior each day for a week to estimate the effect on heart health. When replacing sedentary behavior, as little as five minutes of moderate-vigorous activity had a noticeable effect on heart health.

Dr. Jo Blodgett, first author of the study from UCL Surgery & Interventional Science and the Institute of Sport, Exercise & Health, said: "The big takeaway from our research is that while small changes to how you move can have a positive effect on heart health, intensity of movement matters. The most beneficial change we observed was replacing sitting with moderate to vigorous activity (which could be a run, a brisk walk, or stair climbing) basically any activity that raises your heart rate and makes you breathe faster, even for a minute or two."

The researchers pointed out that although time spent doing vigorous activity was the quickest way to improve heart health, there are ways to benefit for people of all abilities—keeping in mind that the lower the intensity of the activity, the longer the time is required to start having a

tangible benefit. Using a standing desk for a few hours a day instead of a sitting desk, for example, is a change over a relatively large amount of time but is also one that could be integrated into a working routine with minimal difficulty, as it does not require any time commitment.

Though the findings cannot infer causality between movement behaviors and cardiovascular outcomes, they contribute to a growing body of evidence linking moderate to vigorous physical activity over 24 hours with improved body fat metrics. Further long-term studies will be crucial to better understanding the associations between movement and cardiovascular outcomes.

James Leiper, Associate Medical Director at the British Heart Foundation, said: "We already know that exercise can have real benefits for your cardiovascular health and this encouraging research shows that small adjustments to your daily routine could lower your chances of having a heart attack or stroke. This study shows that replacing even a few minutes of sitting with a few minutes of moderate activity can improve your BMI, cholesterol, waist size, and have many more physical benefits.

"Getting active isn't always easy, and it's important to make changes that you can stick to in the long-term and that you enjoy; anything that gets your heart rate up can help. Incorporating 'activity snacks' such as walking while taking phone calls, or setting an alarm to get up and do some star jumps every hour is a great way to start building activity into your day, to get you in the habit of living a healthy, active lifestyle."

University College London. "Any activity is better for your heart than sitting—even sleeping." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 9 November 2023. <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2023/11/231109221503.htm>.



Mental Health Moment

Life's Essential 8

Working to have overall better cardiovascular health can help to lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, and other major health problems. The American Heart Association has highlighted the key measures for improving and supporting overall cardiovascular health called Life's Essential 8. This list is made up of behaviors and factors that can help you to support your heart health.

- 1. Eat Better:** Having a diet that includes mostly whole foods, fruits, vegetables, lean protein, nuts, and seeds can improve heart health.
- 2. Be More Active:** To live an overall healthier lifestyle for good heart health adults should aim for 2.5 hours of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise per week. Children should be active 60 minutes every day including play.
- 3. Quit Tobacco:** The leading cause of preventable death in the US comes from the use of inhaled nicotine delivery products including vaping and e-cigarettes.
- 4. Get Healthy Sleep:** Having the appropriate amount of sleep improves brain function and reduces the risk for chronic disease. Adults need 7-9 hours of sleep each night to achieve optimal health.
- 5. Manage Weight:** Maintaining a healthy weight can lower your risk for heart disease and other chronic diseases.
- 6. Control Cholesterol:** There are two types found in your body. HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol) and LDL cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol). Have a health care professional measure your cholesterol levels and make healthy food choices to improve your numbers.
- 7. Manage Blood Sugar:** Having high levels of blood sugar for an extended period can damage your internal organs. Keep your fasting blood glucose lower than 100 mg/dl
- 8. Manage Blood Pressure:** Maintaining blood pressure within optimal ranges will keep you healthier longer. Optimal blood pressure levels are anything less than 120/80 mm Hg. You can help to achieve these numbers by managing weight, moving more, eating balanced meals, and staying away from nicotine.

"Life's Essential 8." www.heart.org, American Heart Association, www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/lifes-essential-8. Accessed 17 Nov. 2023.

Healthy Plates, Healthy Mind

Some people who are managing mental health conditions may turn to food to self-soothe or find emotional support; others may avoid or limit food intake. These choices can create discomfort for the brain and exacerbate pre-existing feelings.

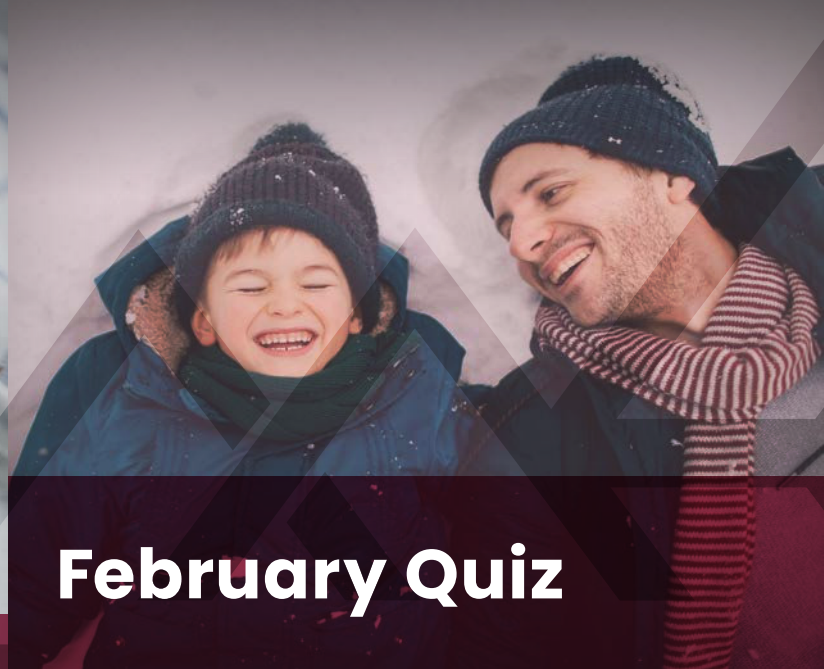
Fortunately, increased mental strain can be remedied by making different (and healthier) food choices. A healthy mind and body are essential elements in coping with mental health issues or other related conditions.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only 1 in 10 adults eat the recommended amount of fruits or vegetables, so you may need to strive to eat more of those essential food groups. Regardless of if you're battling a mental health condition, fruits and vegetables are crucial for maintaining good health. In addition, health experts recommend incorporating the following into your diet to help improve mental health:

- Fermented foods (e.g., kimchi, miso, kombucha, kefir and yogurt)
- Omega-3 fatty acids (e.g., salmon, flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, avocado and olive oil)
- Spices (e.g., turmeric, oregano, rosemary, ginger and garlic)
- Tea (e.g., green, chamomile and herbal)
- Vitamin D (e.g., eggs, fortified milk, mushrooms and salmon)

One of the best ways to sustain a healthy diet is to stock your pantry and refrigerator with easy-to-grab nutritious foods. March is National Nutrition Month, making it a great time to assess your nutrition and ensure you're serving your mind and body well.





Turkey Ragu Penne

Ingredients:

- Kosher salt
- 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 leeks (white and light green parts only), finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 6 oz ground turkey
- 1 28-oz can San Marzano tomatoes, crushed by hand
- Freshly ground pepper
- ¼ cup fresh basil, chopped, plus more for topping
- 3 tbsp freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus the rind (optional)
- 12 oz Penne
- 2 tbsp half-and-half

Directions:

1. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Meanwhile, heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the leeks, garlic and turkey and cook, stirring, until the turkey browns slightly, about 5 minutes.
2. Add the tomatoes, 2 cups water and ¼ teaspoon each salt and pepper. Increase the heat to high, bring the sauce to a boil, and cook 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium, add half of the basil and the parmesan rind and simmer, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 10 minutes.
3. Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook as the label directs. Reserve ½ cup of the cooking water, then drain the pasta. Stir the half-and-half, the remaining basil and 2 tablespoons cheese into the sauce. Add the pasta and toss to coat, adding some of the reserved pasta water to loosen, if needed. Remove the Parmesan rind and season with salt and pepper.
4. Divide the pasta among bowls. Top with the remaining 1 tablespoon cheese and more basil.

Calories: 493kcal, Carbohydrates: 79g, Protein: 26g, Fat: 8g

Kitchen, F. N. (2013, November 21). Penne with turkey ragu. <https://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchen/penne-with-turkey-ragu-recipe-2042231>

February Quiz

Improving Heart Health

1. What are some ways to increase your cardiovascular health?

2. This study shows that replacing even a few minutes of sitting with a few minutes of moderate activity can improve your _____, and have many more physical benefits.

Life's Essential 8

3. Vaping and e-cigarettes do not decrease heart health, only cigarettes do.
a. True b. False
4. How many hours a night do adults need to sleep for optimal health?
a. 6-7 hours b. 7-9 hours c. 9-10 hours

Mental Health Moment

5. What are two food groups that help support mental health?

See page 5 for quiz answers.



Healthy Habits Calendar



Improving Heart Health

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
					Fitness Friday: Do a 20-minute yoga practice to recenter after the long week.	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Motivation Monday: Write down 10 things you are grateful for.		Wellness Wednesday: Add a new fruit or vegetable to your grocery list.		Challenge Check-in: How many minutes have you walked this week?	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Sunday Sleep Habits: Plug in and turn off your phone an hour before you go to bed to get optimal sleep.				Challenge Check-in: What habit has been the hardest to work on?		Social Saturday: Call a friend or family member to catch up.
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	President's Day	Tuesday's Tip: Buy frozen or canned vegetables the next time they are on sale to always have a healthy option on hand.		Thoughtful Thursday: Take time this evening to do some self-care for you! Go on a walk, take a bath, call a friend, etc.		
25	26	27	28	29		
Sunday Sleep Habits: Try reading before bed instead of looking at a screen to create better sleep habits.		Thirsty Tuesday: Start your day with a glass of water to help you reach your water intake goals.				

30 Day Challenge: Healthy Habits

Introduction:

The first three weeks of this challenge focus on improving unhealthy habits like excessive sugar and soda intake and not being physically active. The last week of the challenge will focus on healthy habits that are already established.

As you work towards eliminating unhealthy habits, your health and happiness will greatly improve!



Answers to Quiz:

Q1: Running, walking, stair climbing, using a standing desk, or any way to increase your heart rate

Q2: BMI, cholesterol, waist size | Q3: false | Q4: b. 7-9 hours

Q5: Fermented foods, fatty acids, spices, tea and vitamin D

Week 1		
Weekday	Did you decrease your sugar intake today?	
Sunday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Monday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Wednesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Thursday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Friday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Saturday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Week 2		
Weekday	Were you physically active today?	
Sunday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Monday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Wednesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Thursday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Friday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Saturday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Week 3		
Weekday	Did you decrease your soda intake today?	
Sunday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Monday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Tuesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Wednesday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Thursday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Friday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Saturday	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Week 4	
Weekday	What healthy habit did you do today?
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	