

# Young at Heart\*

## 6 healthy choices you can make today to avoid heart disease tomorrow

At her heaviest, 5'5" Beth Turner weighed 220 pounds. As with most 30-somethings, heart disease was the last thing on her mind. But then she faced the facts. Even at the young age of 30, her weight was setting her up for problems. She began eating healthier and exercising. "So far I've lost 65 pounds," she says.

Turner has taken steps today to prevent heart disease tomorrow. You can, too. Here's how:



### 1 Remember what your mother told you.

If your mom espoused the virtues of veggies and fruits, she was right. "This is the best advice our mothers gave us," says Richard Stiphout, MD, an internist at Kaiser Permanente's Pueblo North Medical Offices. In fact, the American Heart Association recommends eating eight or more fruit and vegetable servings every day.

### 2 Opt out of the "clean plate" club.

The same mom who served you broccoli may have initiated you into the "clean plate club." Sally Foland, RN, program manager for integrated cardiovascular health for Kaiser Permanente Colorado, cautions that overeating—especially with foods high in fat, salt, and sugar—can sabotage your efforts to stay healthy. For portion control, serve meals on smaller plates and consider sharing meals when dining out or ask that half of your meal be packed up to take home. Eat every three or four hours to avoid getting too hungry and overindulging later.

### 3 Just do it.

Physical activity is proven to reduce your risk of heart disease. Foland recommends a target of 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week. What exercise is best? The one that you'll do. For Turner, that's jumping on a mini-trampoline and dancing with her kids. "If you hate running, why are you doing it? Find activities you can enjoy for life," Dr. Stiphout urges. Whether it's yoga, mountain climbing, cycling—or a mix of all three—decide what activities will help you stay active through life.

### 4 De-stress your life.

For most people, the 30s and 40s are busy years of raising children, building careers, and perhaps climbing into—and out of—debt. The balancing can be stressful. "Prolonged, high stress can be a major contributor to high blood pressure," Dr. Stiphout says. The antidotes to stress come in different shapes and sizes, but he suggests prioritizing what's important in life, and taking time to exercise. "You can drop your stress levels back incredibly by paying off debt and staying active," he says, adding that resisting the urge to climb every rung of the corporate ladder can actually be liberating.

## **5** **Quit smoking.**

Sometimes, people smoke as a response to stress. Others are casual smokers who have an occasional cigarette or cigar to celebrate or relax. “Some individuals think they can smoke one to five cigarettes a day and not put themselves at risk of problems from it,” Foland says. It’s time to drop the smokescreen. Quit the habit now before it harms your heart later—not to mention your lungs, circulatory system, bones, and skin.

## **6** **Know your numbers.**

Your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers help determine your risk for heart problems. Your blood sugar, if increased, can also influence your risk. Talk to your doctor about how often to have routine screenings—especially if you have a family history of heart disease. “What we know early does make a difference in preventing heart attacks,” Dr. Stiphout says.

In the end, Foland encourages adults to take stock of their daily lives while they are young. “The multiple, everyday decisions you make lead to what your life becomes and whether you have a healthy or unhealthy body now and in the future,” she says. Turner did, and she’s so glad. “People have asked me, ‘When are you going to be done with your diet?’ It’s not really a diet,” she insists. “I plan on eating this way and moving this way for the rest of my life.”



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