

Seven steps toward a healthier heart

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(HealthDay)—Heart disease is the leading cause of death for U.S. adults, but a healthy lifestyle can reduce that risk, a heart expert says.

The American Heart Association calls its prevention tips "Life's Simple 7" because they're easy to understand and follow, said Dr. Ravi Dave. He is director of the cardiac catheterization lab at the University of California, Los Angeles Medical Center, in Santa Monica.

And because February is American Heart Month, and 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," Dave said in a university news release.

The seven steps are:

- Walk or exercise in other ways for at least 30 minutes five times a week to lower your risk for heart disease, diabetes and stroke.
- Control your 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," Dave said.
- Follow a low-fat, high-fiber diet that includes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fish and other lean proteins.
- Manage high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Keeping [blood pressure](#) under control through exercise, medication, or both can help reduce wear and tear on your heart and other organs.
- Watch your 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," Dave said. "Even modest weight loss reduces your risk of these health issues."
- Keep your blood sugar under control through diet and exercise. High blood sugar levels put you at [risk](#) for diabetes, which boosts the chances of [heart disease](#) and stroke.
- Don't smoke. "It's the single best thing you can do for your

heart—and your overall health," Dave said.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [heart disease prevention](#).

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