

Quinn on Nutrition: Love your heart

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I was fascinated to discover from heart experts at Cleveland Clinic that I was no bigger than a poppy seed when my heart first began to beat during my mom's 4th week of pregnancy. With no effort on my part, my heart beats 100,000 times a day. Each minute, this 10-ounce muscle pumps 1.5 gallons of blood through 6 thousand miles of vessels to deliver oxygen- and nutrient-rich blood to my body cells. Yikes.

Here are some other interesting facts about our hearts: They work better when we are happy. A strong sense of emotional vitality can actually lower our risk for [heart disease](#). When we laugh, for example, the lining of our blood vessels relaxes, increasing the flow of life-generating blood. This effect can last for up to 45 minutes after a hearty laugh, say some experts.

On the other hand, stress can literally cause our hearts to ache. A surge of stress hormones can lead to a real condition known as "broken heart syndrome." And the symptoms—shortness of breath and chest pain—can mimic a heart attack.

Here are some ways to give our hearts tender loving care: Put regular exercise at the top of the list. It's the single most important thing we can do for our hearts, say experts. Besides strengthening this vital muscle, exercise releases hormones that relieve us from stress.

Find your best diet. According to a debate by a panel of experts at a recent scientific session sponsored by the American Heart Association, everything from Mediterranean to keto to vegan diets have evidence to support their heart healthfulness if they include lots of vegetables and other whole foods like fruits, whole grains, nuts, and legumes. Our hearts also do best when we avoid or limit processed meats such as bacon, sausage and other cured, salted and smoked products. And our tickers prefer foods that are not loaded with added sugar and have not lost their fiber and other nutrients through the refining process.

A nice glass of wine may not be a bad idea either. According to Prakash Deedwania, chief of cardiology at the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, "the main mechanism by which alcohol protects the heart is increasing good cholesterol. And the [grape skin](#) provides flavonoids and other antioxidant substances that protect the heart and vessels from the damaging effects of free oxygen radicals

produced by our body."

The American Heart Association advises: "If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. This means an average of one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women." (A drink is one 12 oz. beer, 4 oz. of wine or 1 to 1.5 oz. of spirits.)

Stay close to someone. Studies show that loving relationships with family and friends is good for our hearts. As one survivor of broken [heart](#) syndrome said, "Don't take life too seriously. Stay flexible to the changes life brings. Mitigate stress at all costs ... take time to enjoy your life—friends, family, pets, nature—it's really the simple things that matter most."

May we never miss a beat.

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