

... February 2012 ...

QUICK TAKES

Smoking and Your Numbers



Thankfully, smoking is on the decline in the U.S., but still nearly one in five adult Americans is a smoker. Everyone knows that smoking is bad for you. And most people cite lung cancer as the primary reason for quitting. But that isn't the only reason to quit:

- Smoking raises LDL (bad) cholesterol and lowers HDL (good) cholesterol.
- Smoking damages the walls of your blood vessels, making them more likely to collect fatty deposits.
- Smoking also raises triglycerides, a significant risk factor for heart disease.
- The nicotine in tobacco products can raise your blood pressure by 10 mm Hg or more for up to an hour after you smoke. Smoking throughout the day means your blood pressure may remain constantly high.

Know Your Numbers – Four Steps

You're up to date on your health screenings. You and your doctor have gone over your numbers together. She points out that your BMI, cholesterol and blood pressure have inched up just a bit over the past couple of years and advises you to "watch what you eat" and to "get more exercise." That's good advice, but it's short on details.

Lifestyle choices play a crucial role in keeping your health screening numbers -- BMI, blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides -- in the healthy range. If you successfully control these numbers with a healthy lifestyle you may be able to avoid, delay or reduce the need for medication.

Here are four major lifestyle factors that influence your screening numbers and what you can do to stay healthy.

1. Lose Extra Pounds

Easier said than done. But even losing smaller increments of weight can improve your screening numbers and benefit your health.

- Blood pressure often increases as weight increases. The inverse is true, as well. Blood pressure usually goes down as excess weight is lost. Losing just 10 pounds can help lower your blood pressure.
- Too much weight also tends to increase the amount of LDL (the "bad" cholesterol) levels in your blood. Losing even 5 or 10 pounds can improve your cholesterol levels.
- Excessive body fat sets the stage for type 2 diabetes by decreasing the body's ability to use insulin. Insulin resistance or inadequate insulin production can keep blood sugar high between meals. A weight loss of 10 to 20 pounds may be enough to get blood sugar under control.

You and your doctor can determine your target weight and ways to achieve it.

2. Exercise Regularly

Exercise helps prevent excess weight gain and maintain weight loss. Regular physical activity -- at least 30 to 60 minutes on most days of the week -- reduces your risk for heart disease, stroke, diabetes, depression, arthritis and some cancers.

- It has been shown that regular exercise will reduce blood pressure by 4 to 9 millimeters of mercury with a few weeks of beginning an exercise program.
- Moderate physical exercise can also boost your circulation, raise HDL (the "good" cholesterol) and lower unhealthy triglycerides. This keeps your blood flowing smoothly and reduces your risk of cardiovascular diseases.

You don't have to join a gym to enjoy the benefits of exercise. Take the stairs, rev up your household chores and walk to work. Find ways to build physical activity into your daily routine.

Know Your Numbers – Four Steps

3. Enjoy a Healthy Diet

Eating a diet that's rich in vegetables, beans, fruits, whole grains and low-fat dairy products that also skimps on saturated fats, fried foods and sweets goes a long way to keeping your screening numbers in the healthy range.

The right food choices have an especially positive effect on cholesterol numbers. Eating 5 to 10 grams of soluble fiber every day has been shown to lower HDL and total cholesterol. Beans are loaded with soluble fiber. Include them in soups, salads and side dishes to boost your intake. Oats and barley have the most when it comes to grains. Start the day with a bowl of oatmeal (2 grams soluble fiber) and have an orange for another 2 grams. Omega-3 fatty acids can help boost your HDL ("good") cholesterol. Consider fattier fish, such as salmon, mackerel and herring. Plant sources include walnuts, flaxseeds and canola oil.

4. Reduce Sodium

Even a small reduction in the sodium in your diet can reduce blood pressure by 2 to 8 mm Hg. While salt consumption does not affect your cholesterol levels, a high salt diet can exacerbate the risks associated with high cholesterol by increasing your risk for high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke. A diet high in sodium may aggravate diabetes symptoms. The recommendations for reducing sodium are:

- Limit sodium to 2,300 milligrams (mg) a day. That's about 1 teaspoon of table salt.
- A lower sodium level -- 1,500 mg a day or less -- is recommended for people 51 years of age or older, and people of any age who are African-American or who have high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease.

Tracking salt in a typical American diet will keep a person busy because it's nearly everywhere, especially in prepared or processed foods. In fact, three-quarters of the sodium we consume comes from processed foods. Canned soups, carryout meals, deli meats, prepared sauces and salsas can deliver shockingly high sodium numbers. Check labels and shop wisely.

Source: www.heart.org

20-Minute Chili Serves 4

Low in sodium, low in fat and long on satisfying flavor, this easy recipe is sure to become a regular at your healthy table.

Ingredients

No-stick cooking spray
1 onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 15-ounce (450-g) can low-sodium pinto beans, drained and rinsed
1 14.5-ounce can (435-g) Mexican-style stewed tomatoes, crushed
2 tablespoons chili powder
1 tablespoon chopped chipotle or jalapeño peppers (from a can), optional
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1/8 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa
1 pinch cinnamon
1 16-ounce (440-g) can yellow hominy, rinsed
Chopped cilantro or sliced green onions, for garnish
Lime wedges

Preparation

1. Spray a large, heavy saucepan with cooking spray and set over medium heat. Add onions and cook, stirring, until soft, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook 1 minute longer.
2. Stir in beans, tomatoes, chili powder, chipotles (if using), cumin, oregano, cocoa and cinnamon. Bring to a boil and reduce the heat to low. Simmer for 10 minutes to blend the flavors. Add hominy and cook until heated through.
3. Ladle into bowls and garnish with cilantro or green onions. Serve lime wedges alongside.



Nutritional info

Per serving
277 Calories
2.4g Fat
0.3g Saturated fat
11.0g Protein
54g Carbohydrate
13.1g Fiber
288mg Sodium

Source:
Healthy Living Kitchens