

Eat With Others When You Can

Older adults who eat alone may be more likely to have a poorer diet, studies suggest. For instance, a Japanese study published in the journal of Age and Ageing found that men 65 or older who lived and ate alone were almost 2.5 times more likely to be depressed than those who ate with others. A University of Cambridge study found that those who regularly dine on their own eat significantly fewer vegetables. And several studies suggest that older adults who take their meals in the presence of others consume more than those who dine by themselves.

So try to schedule at least one daily meal with someone else, or think about dining some of the time at a local community or senior center, these often offer group meals.

And when you are eating on your own, make it easier to make healthy choices. Have convenient foods such as hard-boiled eggs, yogurt, and low-sodium frozen dinners on hand. Make up sandwiches ahead of time and arrange them in the fridge. It serves as a cue for you that it's time to eat, even if you're not particularly hungry.



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February is American Heart Month

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the US and February is dedicated to raising awareness about heart disease and increasing knowledge about prevention. Some health conditions and lifestyle factors can put people at a higher risk for developing heart disease. *You can help prevent heart disease by making healthy choices and managing any medical conditions you may have.*

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Choosing healthful meal and snack options can help you avoid heart disease and its complications. Be sure to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables—adults should have at least 5 servings each day. Eating foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol and high in fiber can help prevent high cholesterol. Limiting salt or sodium in your diet also can lower your blood pressure.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese can increase your risk for heart disease. To determine whether your weight is in a healthy range, doctors often calculate a number called the body mass index (BMI). Doctors sometimes also use waist and hip measurements to measure a person's body fat.
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity can help you maintain a healthy weight and lower cholesterol and blood pressure. The Surgeon General recommends that adults should engage in moderate-intensity exercise for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- **Monitor your blood pressure.** High blood pressure often has no symptoms, so be sure to have it checked on a regular basis. You can check your blood pressure at home, at a pharmacy, or at a doctor's office..
- **Don't smoke.** Cigarette smoking greatly increases your risk for heart disease. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, quit as soon as possible. Your doctor can suggest ways to help you quit.
- **Limit alcohol use.** Avoid drinking too much alcohol, which can increase your blood pressure. Men should stick to no more than two drinks per day, and women to no more than one.
- **Have your cholesterol checked.** Your health care provider should test your cholesterol levels at least once every 5 years. Talk with your doctor about this simple blood test.
- **Manage your diabetes.** If you have diabetes, monitor your blood sugar levels closely, and talk with your doctor about treatment options.
- **Take your medicine.** If you're taking medication to treat high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes, follow your doctor's instructions carefully. Always ask questions if you don't understand something.

Heart-Health Valentine's Day Tips

Your sweetheart may have the key to your heart, but eating healthy and being physically active can be the key to a healthier heart. This Valentine's Day, indulge your sweetheart with a heart-healthy gift or date.

- **Rather than tempting your beloved with sweets**, consider a gift that has more permanence. Search for a poem that describes your feelings and write it on beautiful paper or handmade Valentine.
- **Quality time is one of the most meaningful gifts**. Bundle up and plan an active outing such as sledding, ice skating, gathering wood for a fire, or if you're feeling adventurous, visit on indoor rock wall.
- **If your kids are having a Valentine's Day party** at their school or day care, instead of sending candies, consider raisins, grapes, whole-grain pretzels, colored pencils or stickers as tokens of their friendly affection.
- **Cooking at home** is an excellent way to control what and how much you eat. Take a date to a local cooking class to practice your skills or learn a new technique.
- **Prepare a romantic candlelit dinner** at home using a heart-healthy recipe.
- **Give to one another by giving back**. Ask a date to volunteer with you at a local organization. Giving back a healthy habit that can boost your mood and help beat stress.
- **Use this day as an opportunity to tell your loved one** how important they are to you, and share ways that you can support each other's health and wellness.
- **Craving something sweet?** Gift a beautiful fresh fruit basket to your loved one instead of giving sweets with added sugars.
- **Sharing is caring** – if you go out for a romantic dinner date, order one entrée to share. Many restaurant servings are enough for two – splitting will keep you from overdoing it.
- **Don't forget to love Fido, too!** Give your pet a Valentine and remember to walk or exercise them daily – getting active with your pet will benefit your health and your bond with your pets.
- **Take it slow** – if you receive a luxurious box of chocolates from your sweetie, stick it in the freezer and enjoy it in moderation over the next several weeks.
- **Take a long, romantic walk with your beloved** – and try to make it a regular habit. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderately intense physical activity each week to help keep your heart healthy. You can reach this goal by walking briskly for at least 30 minutes five days each week.

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Heart Benefits of a Hearty Laugh

Laughter is contagious. But don't worry about spreading it around. Growing research suggests that regularly getting your giggles going offers several health benefits beyond the emotional ones. Specifically, laughing appears to:

Increase blood flow. Researchers at the University of Maryland Medical Center measured the blood-moving capacity of arteries after volunteers watched humorous or stressful films. After volunteers laughed through scenes from "There's Something About Mary" their arteries expanded, but they constricted after viewing battle scenes from "Saving Private Ryan." And in a small one-year study of heart-attack patients, those who watched comedies for 30 minutes a day were less likely to suffer a second heart attack than those who did not watch funny videos.

Lower blood sugar. People with type 2 diabetes maintain better blood sugar-control after watching comic performances, research suggests. A Japanese study of 10 people with the condition suggests that might stem from beneficial changes in immune regulation that prevent damaging inflammation from undermining blood-sugar control.

Regulate the immune system. In another small study, laughter significantly reduced levels of inflammation-triggering cytokines in people with rheumatoid arthritis. Other research suggests that after viewing humorous films, people with asthma became more resistant to flare ups, those with allergies suffer fewer symptoms, and children with allergic skin rashes sleep more easily. A good laugh might also stimulate production of disease-fighting T cells and natural killer cells.

Burn calories. Laughing boosts energy expenditure by 10 to 20 percent, according to Vanderbilt University researchers. They calculated that 15 minutes of hearty laughter could burn up to 40 calories, enough to shed 4 pounds a year.

Ease pain. Laughter contracts and relaxes muscles in the abdomen, face, and shoulders, which might ease muscle tension and spasms that contribute to pain. And the temporary distraction helps too.

Recommendation. While 4-year-olds laugh about every 4 minutes, adults do it about once an hour. So spend time each day having fun. Trade jokes, watch comedies, horse around with your kids or grandkids, or share a laugh while in line at the grocery store. It will brighten your day – and maybe provide a much-appreciated dose of mirthful medicine.