

# Your Connection to Health

February 2023

## Life's Essential 8



From the American Heart Association

**Getting enough sleep?** A duration of seven to nine hours daily for adults, and more for children, is considered necessary for good health, according to the American Heart Association's (AHA) new **Life's Essential 8**. Because of sleep's importance to our well-being, the AHA has added healthy sleep to its previously seven key components of heart health.



**During American Heart Month in February, consider the eight factors that protect your cardiovascular (CV) system:**

1. Healthy diet: Updated with a new guide to assess diet.
2. Participation in physical activity.
3. Avoiding nicotine exposure: Updated to account for vaping and secondhand smoke.
4. Healthy weight.
5. Healthy blood lipids: Updated to adjust blood cholesterol measures.
6. Healthy blood glucose: Updated to adjust blood sugar measures.
7. Healthy blood pressure.
8. Healthy sleep: New.

**As noted above, the AHA has updated four of the previous Essential 7 factors** to help you more effectively lower your risk for heart disease, stroke and other major health problems.

**This latest AHA health checklist** showed about 80% of U.S. adults had moderate to low CV health, with lowest scores occurring in diet, physical activity and BMI (body mass index).

**The researchers found that just 19.6% of U.S. adults had high CV health; 62.5% had moderate CV health and 17.9% had low CV health.** Adult women had higher average CV health scores than men. The AHA used a new method of scoring each component to average an overall heart health score on a scale from 0 to 100.

**Learn more** about protecting your heart in this issue's "Healthy Body, Healthy Heart," on page 2.

“Live life to the fullest, and focus on the positive.” — Matt Cameron

 **The Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **The Value of Prevention**, is at [personalbest.com/extras/23V2tools](https://personalbest.com/extras/23V2tools).

## BEST bits



**During National Children's Dental Health Month, check out dental sealants to help prevent cavities in your children.** Cavities are caused by a breakdown of tooth enamel by acids from bacteria that collect on teeth. Dental sealants are a quick and painless way to protect against 80% of the cavities children get in their permanent back teeth (molars), where nine in ten cavities occur, for two years. Sealants are thin coatings painted on the chewing surfaces of the back teeth. Learn more at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).



**Eating disorders are serious, complex and sometimes fatal illnesses that cause radical preoccupation with food.** The most common forms are anorexia nervosa (eating very little), bulimia nervosa (eating followed by purging) and binge eating (anxiety-triggered overeating). The average ages of onset are 18 to 21 years old. **National Eating Disorders Awareness Week** is February 20 to 26. Learn more at [nationaleatingdisorders.org](https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org).

**Close to 30 million adults in the U.S. could benefit from hearing aid use.** Hearing aids are now available over the counter for those with perceived mild to moderate hearing impairment to buy hearing aids more quickly. They are available from stores or online retailers without a medical exam, prescription or a fitting adjustment by an audiologist.

**Most people with Omicron, a COVID-19 variant, may not realize they are infected.** That's the conclusion of researchers from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, UCLA and Abbott Laboratories, who studied 210 adults (almost all vaccinated against COVID-19) during a surge of the virus around Los Angeles in spring of 2022. More than half who tested positive for the virus were unaware they had it — some had slight symptoms they thought were colds. The good news from the study is Omicron may cause mild or no symptoms in the vaccinated. The bad news is those in the study who were unaware they had Omicron likely and rapidly spread the virus in their community.

# Healthy Body, Healthy Heart

**Each day your heart beats, on average, 100,000 times**, pumping your blood through a vast system of blood vessels that's more than 60,000 miles long. Your heart is an amazing engine, but it needs your help to keep blood moving.

**That means controlling or even preventing the primary factors that lead to heart disease and heart attack: high blood pressure, unhealthy blood cholesterol levels and smoking.** Nearly half of the U.S. population has at least one of these risks, according to the CDC. Other factors that put us at a higher risk for heart trouble include:

- Diabetes.
- Unhealthy diet.
- Excessive alcohol use.
- Overweight and obesity.
- Physical inactivity.
- Insufficient sleep.

## Steps to better heart health and lower risk of cardiovascular disease:

**Manage your blood pressure** to reduce strain on your heart, arteries and kidneys.

**Monitor your blood cholesterol** to give your arteries their best chance to remain free of blockage.

**Stop using tobacco.** Cigarette smoking significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke.

**Maintain healthy blood sugar** to help prevent type 2 diabetes, a factor that can damage your heart, kidneys and nerves.

**Eat well.** A heart-smart eating plan contains lots of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, nuts and fish. It's also lower in refined flour, salt, meat and sweets.

**Move every day.** Physical activity helps keep your heart muscle strong. Making your heart work harder through consistent, moderate- to vigorous-intensity exercise can help lower your blood pressure and keep your heart in shape. Getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity weekly (any amount is beneficial, but more is better), such as brisk walking, helps reduce your heart disease risk.

**Maintain a healthy weight.** Both aerobic exercise and resistance (weight) training burn calories, aid weight loss and help improve your baseline metabolic rate. The more muscle mass you develop, the more calories you burn. Losing even 10% of your weight can reduce the burden on your heart. Your health care provider can help you safely manage your weight.

**Watch your alcohol intake.** The American Heart Association advises that men should have no more than two drinks per day, and women should have no more than one drink per day. If you don't drink alcohol, don't start.

**Make time to sleep.** You need seven to nine hours every night (or day, if you work shifts). Quality sleep allows the body to repair itself and helps reduce inflammation, a contributing factor in heart ailments. Did you know? Sleep deprivation is linked to high blood pressure and heart disease, according to the CDC.



## Signs of Heart Attack:

- **Chest pain or discomfort:** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center or left side of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes or that goes away and returns. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- **Feeling weak, lightheaded or faint:** You may also break out into a cold sweat.
- **Pain or discomfort:** Occurs in the jaw, neck or back.
- **Pain or discomfort:** Occurs in one or both arms or shoulders.
- **Shortness of breath:** This often comes along with chest discomfort, but shortness of breath also can happen before chest discomfort.
- **Other symptoms:** These may include unusual or unexplained tiredness and nausea or vomiting.

# Got Scary News Anxiety? Here's Help

**It's hard to avoid 24/7 online news, especially if your phone is always at hand.** And, of course, it's important to stay abreast of what's happening in your community, country and the world. But a barrage of headlines about war, shootings, pandemics and financial woes, day after day, can harm your mental health.

**You can't ignore the news, but these tips can help you cope.**

- **Stop doom scrolling.** After you've read frightening news, there's no reason to read details about the event over and over.
- **Avoid online groups and websites that feed your fears.** From wild conspiracy theories, to not-always-accurate medical advice, social

media can spike anxiety. Talk to your health care provider about medical worries instead of relying on the internet.

- **Limit your news consumption.** There's a big difference between checking news once or twice a day and every few minutes. Consider deleting news apps to give yourself a mental break.
- **Commit to consistent, tried-and-true stress management techniques.** Daily exercise, adequate sleep and eating healthy all help combat stress and mitigate news anxiety.
- **Calm hopeless feelings with practical action.** If reports of suffering, climate change and other worrisome news make you feel hopeless, take realistic action when you can. For example, write your representatives or recycle and donate household items you no longer need to charity.



While there are risks for dementia you can't control, staying active physically and mentally may help lower the odds of developing this memory-robbing condition. A case in point: An analysis of 38 studies worldwide, involving more than two million people, revealed leisure activities may help keep dementia at bay. Among the participants, 75,000 developed dementia while researchers were following them.

Those who pursued leisure activities regularly had a 17% lower risk of dementia. Physical activity reported included walking, running, swimming, bicycling, yoga, dancing, volunteering and socializing with friends and family. Intellectual pursuits included reading, watching movies, playing musical instruments and making art. **Note:** The data were self-reported and may not have always been accurate.



## TIP of the MONTH

### Focus on Your Food

Instead of scarfing down copious amounts of food between meals, choose nutritious snacks and eat them mindfully. That means enjoying snacks without distractions, such as your TV, smartphone or computer screen. Choose a snack-sized bag or serve yourself a portion on a plate or bowl, rather than eating out of a family-size box or bag, which may cause you to mindlessly overeat past your fullness cue. Serving yourself helps with portion control. Remember to enjoy every bite.

# Snacks vs. Treats

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Three daily meals may not keep you energized all day, but snacks help fill the hunger gap. Despite criticism from the dieting community, snacks are a good idea science supports.

Studies show that distributing food daily across four to five small meals and snacks (rather than three large meals) favorably affects health. Snacks alleviate digestive and metabolic overload that can come from eating three large meals. Plus, choosing nourishing snacks helps ensure you get enough nutrients throughout the day.

Of course, the type of snacks you choose is important. How can you tell a snack from a treat? Snacks are mini-meals made of nourishing whole foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts and lean proteins. Treats are ultra-processed foods high in sugar, salt and/or fat, such as chips, soft drinks, fast food, pastries and candy.

Between meals, fuel up with a nourishing snack. Choose options that offer some protein paired with fiber-rich carbs. Examples include:

- Apple and cheddar cheese.
- Nuts, seeds and dried fruit.
- Vegetables and hummus.
- Yogurt with fruit.
- Banana with peanut butter.
- Berries and cottage cheese.
- Crackers with egg or tuna salad.



Treats provide pleasure and enjoyment, so they have a place in a healthy eating plan. But, they are meant to be enjoyed in moderation, which means smaller amounts eaten less often than snacks. Why? Because treats don't add meaningful amounts of vitamins, minerals or fiber to your diet and tend to be high in sugar and sodium.

Studies show that people who eat lots of treats, especially in the evening while distracted by a screen, tend to have diets that are less nourishing and more likely to contribute to weight gain.

eating smart



## Greek Yogurt Ranch Dip with Vegetables

- |                                  |                         |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 cup plain non-fat Greek yogurt | ½ tsp dried parsley     |
| 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar       | ¼ tsp kosher salt       |
| 1 tsp extra-virgin olive oil     | 1 cup carrot sticks     |
| ½ tsp garlic powder              | 1 cup sliced red pepper |
| ½ tsp onion powder               | 1 cup cucumber sticks   |
| ½ tsp dried dill                 |                         |

In a medium bowl, stir together Greek yogurt, vinegar, oil, garlic powder, onion powder, dill, parsley and salt. **Garnish** with a pinch of dried dill or parsley. **Serve** with carrots, red peppers and cucumbers for dipping.

**Makes 2 servings. Per serving:** 152 calories | 14g protein | 3g total fat | 1g saturated fat | 1g mono fat | 1g poly fat | 18g carbohydrate | 9g sugar (0 added sugar) | 4g fiber | 379mg sodium

EASY recipe





## Stay in Touch

Keep those questions and suggestions coming!

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## EXPERT advice — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

### Q: How much sitting is too much?



**A:** Any prolonged sitting can be harmful. Sitting more than eight hours a day with no physical activity increased the likelihood of death as much as smoking and obesity, according to an analysis of one million people enrolled in 13 studies.

**The risks for weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer also went up with extended sitting.** The good news is this study found 60 to 75 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity daily — such as brisk walking — helped neutralize the detrimental effects of sitting for long periods.

**Take steps to reduce sitting.** With your health care provider's approval, gradually build up to 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise each week. When you must sit, take a break every 30 minutes to stand up and stretch or walk around the office. Use your watch or phone to track the time. Or consider getting a standup desk or treadmill desk; both are effective ways to stay productive while not sitting.

## AED Advice

**If you witness someone in cardiac arrest, you need to act quickly.**

Using an automated external defibrillator (AED) can save that person's life. An AED is a computerized device that can check a person's heart rhythm and determine whether to use a shock to restart the heart.



**If someone is unresponsive and has no pulse, follow these steps for using an AED:**

1. Call 911 or have someone call for you.
2. Turn on the AED and follow the voice prompts.
3. Remove clothing from chest area.
4. Place one pad on the upper right side of the bare chest.
5. Place the other pad on the lower left side of the bare chest, a few inches below the left armpit.
6. Plug the pad connector cable into the AED, if necessary.
7. Make sure no one is touching the person.
8. Say, "CLEAR!" in a loud, commanding voice.
9. If the AED determines a shock is needed, deliver the shock by pushing the shock button.

**After the AED delivers the shock, or if no shock is advised,** you will be prompted to check if the person is breathing normally. If not, you will need to start CPR.

**Note:** Seek your health care provider's guidance in providing CPR if you live with someone who is at risk for needing it.



**It's easy to become distracted at work.** But sticking to some simple strategies can help you focus better and longer with fewer interruptions. Controlling your devices is key — don't let technology control you. Use your phone's airplane mode to limit text messages and calls during certain times of the day (you can always exempt specific numbers). Check email only three or four times daily. Stop adding reply all in emails unless you need to hear from everyone. And make a to-do list for your day's top priorities and stick to it.

**Note:** Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date pandemic information visit [coronavirus.gov](http://coronavirus.gov).