

# Maintaining good health

**A**lthough good health habits can't ward off all illnesses, they go a long way toward preventing many major illnesses, such as heart disease and stroke.

A study in the December 1, 1999, issue of *JAMA* reports that men and women who are at low risk in 3 major risk factors (good levels of cholesterol, normal blood pressure, and not smoking) were much less likely to die from stroke or heart disease, compared to those who had 1 or more of the risk factors for those conditions. People with low risk factors also had longer life expectancies.

### EAT HEALTHY:

Eat a diet low in fat, high in fiber, with at least 5 servings a day of fruits and vegetables. A healthy diet with all of these components helps to prevent many illnesses, including some forms of cancer.

### TO PREVENT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND CHOLESTEROL:

- Maintain a healthy weight; lose weight if you are overweight
- Be more physically active
- Eat foods low in fat, high in fiber, and low in salt and sodium
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation

### WAYS TO STAY HEALTHY:



• Don't use any form of tobacco



• Don't use illegal drugs



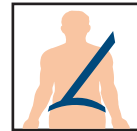
• Maintain a healthy weight



• Practice safe sex



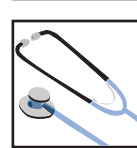
• Eat a healthy diet



• Use seat belts (and car seats for children) every time you ride in a car



• Exercise regularly



• See your doctor regularly for preventive care and counseling



• Drink alcohol only in moderation

### EXERCISE:

People who are generally inactive can greatly improve their health by becoming even only moderately active every day. This can reduce their risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and colon cancer. Including low- to moderate-intensity physical activities in your day can have a tremendous positive benefit to your health. These activities include taking a walk, climbing the stairs, gardening, yard work, moderate to heavy housework, or dancing.

For those who like more vigorous exercise, such as jogging or biking, 20 minutes at least 3 times a week is recommended. Talk to your doctor before starting any exercise regimen, especially if you have health conditions or have not been physically active for a long time.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute  
NHLBI Information Center  
P.O. Box 30105  
Bethesda, MD 20824-0105  
301/592-8573 or [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

### INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm). Previous *JAMA* Patient Pages on related topics were published on weight management (October 27, 1999), smoking cessation (September 1, 1999), fiber (June 2, 1999), and exercise (January 27, 1999).

Additional Sources: American Academy of Family Physicians, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

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