

Home Is Where the Heart Health Is

EVERY ROOM IN YOUR HOUSE PLAYS A PART IN KEEPING YOUR CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM IN GOOD SHAPE

Your heart keeps you going all day, every day—and it deserves your loving attention just as often. Fortunately, it's easy to make caring for this vital organ part of your daily routine. Almost every corner of your house offers opportunities to improve your heart's health. From breakfast to bedtime, here's a room-by-room guide.

1 BEDROOM

Get plenty of sleep—preferably seven to nine hours, says cardiologist John Kennedy, M.D., a member of the American Heart Association's board of directors in the North Bay area of California. Research shows sleeping less than five hours a night increases your risk of developing high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

2 HOME OFFICE

Use your computer as a wellness tool. You're just a few clicks away from online resources that can help you calculate your health risks and develop plans to reduce them.

Limit the time you spend at the keyboard after work. "Tell yourself to put down the BlackBerry and pick up some blueberries," Kennedy says. It's not just about reducing work-related stress or being more active, he adds. It's about spending time with the people you love. That's good for your heart in more than just the medical sense.

3 STAIRCASE

For optimal heart health, adults need at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily. Start each morning with 10 minutes of stair stepping, and you're on your way! If your house is a single level or you just want some time outside, take a walk through the neighborhood.

4 FAMILY ROOM

Require your kids to earn TV or video game time with active play-time. Set a good example by using your exercise equipment when you watch TV, suggests dietitian Judith Levine, M.S., R.D., an American Heart Association spokeswoman.

Also, use your family room as a sanctuary. You can reduce stress, slow your heart rate and improve circulation by spending 15 undisturbed minutes a day in your favorite chair. Here's how:

- Relax by inhaling deeply through your nose and exhaling slowly through your mouth.
- Repeat this seven times.
- Spend the rest of your 15 minutes imagining a place you enjoy, like the beach or a garden.
- After your 15 minutes are up, go about your day, but remind yourself of your peaceful place whenever you're stressed.

"When you breathe deeply, you stimulate the process that protects us from stress," says Kennedy, who has a forthcoming book, *Breathe: Heal Your Heart in 15 Minutes a Day*, about the technique.

Healthy Eating—Anywhere

You can't always stay home. Visit the American Heart Association's website for tips on how to order a healthy meal no matter where you dine. Visit americanheart.org and search "tips for eating out."



5 KITCHEN

To make the heart of your home heart-smart, do a little remodeling, Levine suggests. No, you don't need to call the contractors. Just change your shopping habits:

- If you don't keep saturated fats and red meat in stock, you won't be tempted to eat them. Consider them an occasional restaurant treat.
- Don't let your cupboard get bare! "If you don't have anything tempting in the house, that's when you'll get fast food and cookies," Levine says. Instead, stock up on lower-fat versions of foods you already love.
- If you don't have time to shop for and cook fresh fruits and vegetables, buy frozen—they're just as good nutritionally!
- No time to cook at all? Pizza and fried chicken aren't your only pre-made options. Opt for fruit salad, sliced turkey and French bread, or something from the salad bar.
- When you order out, get an extra salad—or two—to take home. If it's already made, you're more likely to eat it. "You may have a head of lettuce in the refrigerator, but if you don't use it, it's not healthy," Levine points out. "You're going to spend the money anyway, so spend it in a healthy way." —By Fawn Fitter