

CHECKLIST TO HELP YOU MAINTAIN A HEALTHY HEARTBEAT

In observance of Heart Month, IBHRE provides the following checklist to help you maintain a healthy heart:



Check Your Pulse Rate

Check your pulse regularly, particularly when you're exercising or engaging in strenuous activity. Doing this tells you if your heart is pumping blood effectively and at a regular rate. Cleveland Clinic is one of many healthcare facilities that post instructions on how to check your pulse.

Check it out here: <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/23918-how-to-take-your-pulse>



Check Your Heart Rhythm!

It is equally important to ensure that you have a regular heart rhythm. An irregular, or quivering, heart rhythm can signal atrial fibrillation, which puts you at a higher risk of a stroke. Left untreated, an irregular heart rhythm doubles the risk for a heart-related death.




Know the Signs of AFib

Atrial Fibrillation or AFib is a heart rhythm disorder that for some, may have no symptoms. For others, there are clear signs that will tell you that something is wrong. Here's a list of symptoms to watch out for:

- Feeling fatigued or having low to no energy
- An irregular heartbeat, or an unusually fast heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Racing or pounding of the heart
- Difficulty in performing normal activities or exercises
- Pain, pressure, tightness, or discomfort in the chest
- Dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting



Get Physical!

Being active is key to maintaining a healthy heartbeat.  It's normal for your heart rate to increase when you exercise so don't get alarmed if your heart rate increases to 130 to 150 beats per minute or more. That simply means that your heart is working to get more blood flowing through your body.



Choose Good Fats vs. Bad Fats

Good fats are unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats) and are found in foods like olive oil, avocados, nuts, and fatty fish. Bad fats (saturated and trans fats) are usually solid at room temperature and are found in butter, processed foods, and red meat. Consumption of bad fats can raise bad cholesterol levels in the blood and increase the risk of heart disease.



Eat Heart Healthy Foods

Maintaining healthy eating habits, including choosing foods rich in healthy (good) fats, is essential for the body's cell function and energy production. Additionally, foods high in potassium (such as bananas, oranges, and leafy greens) balance the effects of sodium on blood pressure and help you maintain a healthy heart rate.



Monitor Your Cholesterol

Too much cholesterol in the blood can cause plaque (cholesterol and fatty material) to build up inside your arteries, which makes it hard for blood to flow to the heart and can lead to coronary heart disease (CHD). Severe chest pains can be a sign that you could have plaque buildup in your arteries. If this happens, consult your physician immediately.



Protect Your Mental Health

Don't sweat the small stuff! Stress, anxiety and depression have a direct impact on your heart rate. When stressed, your body releases hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, which can increase your heart rate and blood pressure. So when you're feeling stressed or anxious, engage in a calming activity such as meditation, taking a walk, or practicing yoga.



Get Quality Sleep

For good health, adults require 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. For quality sleep, adhere to a regular bed and wakeup routine, turn off the television and electronic devices, particularly those that emits bright lights.



Cut Out Smoking!

It has been proven that smoking makes your heart work harder and, thereby, increases your heart rate. It also causes a tightening of major arteries, triggers an irregular heart rhythm, and raises blood pressure, which increases the risk of stroke.



Limit Caffeine Consumption

Caffeine increases the heart rate and blood pressure in some individuals. High consumption of caffeine can potentially lead to palpitations or extra beats. Be mindful of the amount of coffee you consume and limit your use of energy drinks.



Drink Alcohol in Moderation

Large consumption of alcohol can lead to a sharp increase in your heart rate causing a condition called tachycardia. Excessive episodes of tachycardia could lead to irregular rhythms that can cause heart failure, a heart attack, or stroke.



Drink Enough Water

Dehydration makes your heart work harder to pump blood through your body, can contribute to an increase in your heart rate, and trigger palpitations. Generally, drinking 6-8 glasses of water a day will keep you hydrated but this depends on your level of physical activity, the climate, and your general health condition.



Consult Your Physician

A change in your heart rate doesn't necessarily mean that you have a heart problem. However, if you experience a persistent change along with other symptoms such as dizziness or feeling faint, have your primary physician check things out. Remember, always consult your physician before making major changes to your diet and exercise routine.

Sources: Heart Rhythm Society – Upbeat.org, American Heart Association, Dept. of Health & Human Services Office of Diabetes Prevention & Health Promotion, British Heart Foundation, Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Texas Health Institute