



American Heart Association®

Hard Hats with Heart™



Toolbox Talks

Life's Essential 8

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Life's Essential 8 are the key measures for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health, as defined by the American Heart Association. Better cardiovascular health helps lower the risk for heart disease, stroke and other major health problems. Life's Essential 8 comprises two major areas: Health Behaviors and Health Factors

Health Behaviors

1. **Diet:** Aim for an overall healthy eating pattern that includes whole foods, lots of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, nuts, seeds, and cooking in non-tropical oils such as olive and canola.
2. **Physical Activity:** Adults should get 2 ½ hours of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week. Kids should have 60 minutes every day, including play and structured activities.
3. **Nicotine Exposure:** Use of inhaled nicotine delivery products, which includes cigarettes, e-cigarettes and vaping, is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S., including about 1/3 of all deaths from heart disease. About 1/3 of U.S. children ages 3-11 are exposed to secondhand smoke or vaping.
4. **Sleep Duration:** Most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Adequate sleep promotes healing, improves brain function and reduces the risk for chronic diseases.

Health Factors

5. **Weight:** Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight has many benefits. Body mass index, a numerical value of your weight in relation to your height, is a useful gauge. Optimal BMI is 25. You can calculate it online or consult a health care professional.
6. **Cholesterol:** High levels of non-HDL, or "bad," cholesterol can lead to heart disease. Your health care professional can consider non-HDL cholesterol as the preferred number to monitor, rather than total cholesterol, because it can be measured without fasting beforehand and is reliably calculated.
7. **Blood Sugar:** Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose (or blood sugar) that our bodies use as energy. Over time, high levels of blood sugar can damage your heart, kidneys, eyes and nerves.
8. **Blood Pressure:** Keeping your blood pressure within acceptable ranges can keep you healthier longer. Levels less than 120/80 mm Hg are optimal. High blood pressure is defined as 130-139 mm Hg systolic pressure (the top number in a reading) or 80-89 mm Hg diastolic pressure (bottom number).

Frequently Asked Questions:

How do I know which changes to make for my own life?

The American Heart Association's My Life Check is an online tool that you can use to assess your own heart health and better understand your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Discussion Questions:

- Did any of these surprise you?