

February is American Heart Health Month

Over 8 million Americans have had a heart attack, stroke or heart failure. Are we taking it seriously enough? That's the theme of a new **scientific statement** from the American Heart Association, in a review of 74 studies on strategies to help people stay heart-healthy.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) accounts for over a third of deaths in the US, making it the leading cause of death among both men and women. Lifestyle factors, including poor diet, lack of physical activity and tobacco use are still the major culprits in the twin epidemics of obesity and heart disease. But this study demonstrates that lifestyle changes can turn these frightening statistics around.

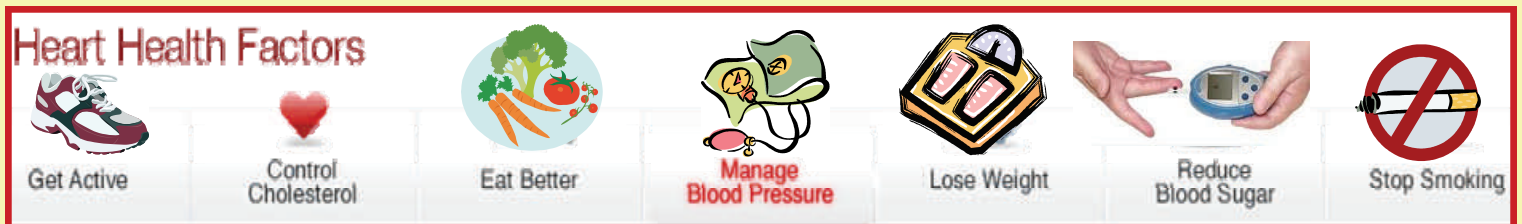


Modest sustained lifestyle changes can seriously reduce CVD morbidity and mortality. Because most beneficial effects accrue over time, long-term adherence maximizes results. Interventions targeting nutrition, weight reduction and new exercise habits often result in impressive short term benefits. But, people need to maintain the changes for life to reduce risks.

Sustained changes, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, will boost our average life expectancy by almost 7 years. Change is hard, however consider the Heart Health Factors illustrated below.

Life's Simple 7's is one way we to understand e CVD risks. we can start taking control our health. The AHA program asks us to follow seven guidelines for a healthy life. These include:

Make change fun by including family and friends.



It's going to take more than individual efforts to effect lasting change, the authors stated. "AHA' advocacy committee has set strategic goals for policy makers to consider," Dr. Ralph Sacco, AHA president said. These include more physical activity in the schools and programs specifically targeted to preventing childhood obesity (such as Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" initiative). Dr. Sacco recommends these changes in policy:

- *Changes in food labeling, such as those in place in New York City and other areas, which help make consumers more aware of what they're putting in their bodies.*
- *Set policy limits on trans-fats.*
- *Calorie and portion-size labeling for all food items and menus.*
- *More preventive services covered under the Affordable Health Care Act.*

Working on policy changes helps our communities make the healthy choice the easy choice!

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