

## Advice from Alice

February is Healthy Heart Month. How healthy is your heart? There are a lot of strategies you can use to help keep your heart beating for many years to come!

On these long and dark winter days, many of us may look like this:



When our heart would prefer that we look like this.....



Consult your physician before getting up off that couch, and then choose an activity you truly enjoy and make it a part of your life. If you get bored with one type of exercise, then find other activities that keep you moving and keep your heart beating. Your couch will benefit from less “wear and tear” and you will benefit from lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, lower body weight and increased energy.

Speaking of body weight, choosing a healthy diet will also improve your heart health. Avoid foods that are high in saturated fats; choose more fruits and vegetables instead. If you are overweight, this one simple switch may be all that it takes to start losing those excess pounds! Even if you maintain a healthy weight, “striving for five” (fruits and vegetables, that is) makes great heart health sense.

One thing you shouldn't do is to go on fad diets. While you may lose weight quickly, you will not be providing your body with all the nourishment it needs. Almost everyone who loses weight this way gains it back when they return to more traditional eating patterns. A balanced diet is the best way to be sure that you are getting most of the vitamins and minerals you need. Using a multivitamin to supplement your balanced diet is also a good idea.

Stress is a part of everyone's life, but dealing with stress effectively may actually lengthen your life. Did you know that the most common time to have a heart attack, according to some sources at least, is Monday morning? Try to

**lessen your stress by taking deep, relaxing breaths. Keep work responsibilities in perspective, and prioritize what you can reasonably accomplish each day. Consider using a part of your lunch hour to take a walk or listen to music: make it a real “break” in the workday! Remember, very few people who know that they are dying say “I wish I had worked harder and spent more time on the job!” Work is an important part of life – but it is not the only one!**

**Home can be stressful, too. One way to address these stressors is to work hard at communicating clearly with those you love. Practice good listening skills. Be willing to take some “time outs” if you find yourself wanting to say hurtful, insulting things. Try to name what you are feeling and why before speaking out in anger and encourage family members to do likewise. Find personal strategies that help you to relieve stress and address problems more calmly. These actions won’t eliminate conflict and stress, but they may prevent the situation from getting worse.**

**Finally, eliminate the substances that have been shown to shorten your life! If you smoke – don’t!!! Consider joining a smoking cessation group, either at work or in your community. The odds of quitting cigarettes increase every time you try, so don’t give up if you’ve tried in the past and relapsed. Learn from your mistakes, and try, try, try again! For support and free nicotine replacement, visit [www.NYQUITS.com](http://www.NYQUITS.com) .**

**Alcohol consumption is a two-edged sword when it comes to heart health. Consuming a little alcohol may actually improve heart health. But drinking too much increases your risk of death in a myriad of ways. Moderation is the key!**

**Change is never easy. These changes outlined here are worth the effort, though: they can literally add years to your life! Make small changes that are easy to live with, then – when you feel ready- make some more. Those little changes can really add up over time. And they can ultimately give you more time to enjoy your family, your friends, and a very full life.**

**Remember Always...**

**Prevention is Power!**