

Healthy Heart Tips for a Bad Economy

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SATURDAY, Feb. 7 (HealthDay News) -- The economic news is enough to weaken anyone's heart, and it sometimes does with people feeling stressed, eating poorly and cutting out workouts while trying to make ends meet.

"We've seen an increase in patients complaining about heart palpitations, anxiety and stress over the past months," Karol Watson, an associate professor of cardiology at the David Geffen School of Medicine at University of California, Los Angeles, said in a news release issued by the school. "Much of heart disease can be prevented. That's why it is so important to follow a healthy lifestyle and to control your cardiovascular risk factors."

UCLA cardiologists offer these tips for adults and children in these tough economic times:

Eat better; exercise more. Eat a healthy diet, including five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. By cooking simple fresh foods at home, rather than indulging in restaurant fare or fast foods, you can save money and your health. Maintaining a good diet and exercise program -- even if it's just 30 minutes of walking around the neighborhood -- helps you prevent obesity, which adds to the risk of heart attacks, heart failure and diabetes.

Don't skimp on health care. Putting off doctor visits, especially when you have symptoms, hurts your health more in the long run, as does skipping medications or splitting pills to cut costs. Maintain regular checkups. Look at pharmaceutical company prescription programs if medication costs are a concern for you.

Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke. Smoking is an expensive habit that greatly increases your risk of cardiovascular problems. Quitting smoking quickly reduces the risk to your heart.

Reduce stress. Find a positive outlet -- such as exercise, meditation or the company of others -- to ease stress and improve your health.

Maintain healthy cholesterol levels. Get your levels checked and talk to your physician about the best plan of action to keep your LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels low and your HDL ("good") cholesterol levels high.

Check your blood pressure. Hypertension is called the "silent killer," because it exhibits few warning signs. Today, several effective treatments are available for high blood pressure. If your blood pressure is normal, maintain it with a healthy lifestyle.

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