



Heart-Healthy Tips: Your Guide To A Heart-Healthy Summer

For many people, summer is synonymous with carefree days of camping, hiking, swimming, and exploring. Warm weather and long summer days provide plenty of opportunities to maintain an active lifestyle. However, summer is also a time of bountiful barbeques and the risk of heat-related illnesses and sunburns. By following these few simple guidelines, you can enjoy the summertime while keeping your heart and health strong.

You can see the evidence of summertime everywhere you go. Pedestrians fill the sidewalks, restaurants have outdoor seating that is always full, and parks are crowded with children on their school break. This might just be the easiest time of the year to get active! Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- ▶ Go hiking in a cool, shaded forest or park at dawn or dusk. Remember to wear mosquito and tick repellent to avoid nasty bites.
- ▶ Play with your children in a local park.
- ▶ Go swimming! Swimming is a great low-impact, big-results exercise that is easy on knees, so even people with special considerations can participate.
- ▶ Use your lunch break at work to walk around the neighborhood. Besides getting exercise, that dose of fresh air and sunshine will brighten your whole afternoon.
- ▶ Organize a cookout – and include a pick-up game of softball or flag football.
- ▶ Take a guided walking tour of your city. You might find out things you never knew! Or simply go exploring on your own. There are usually a variety of outdoor festivals, concerts, and exhibits available during the summer.

Lazy, warm weekends are filled with traveling and cookouts, both of which can make it hard to watch your calorie and fat intake. You can enjoy these gatherings with friends and family while still eating well. Try these heart-healthy nutrition tips:

- ▶ Fresh fruits and vegetables abound in the summer; tomatoes, strawberries, blueberries, and summer squash are just a few. Add these into your meals, enjoy as a side dish, or use them to create a refreshing cold salad.
- ▶ High gas prices mean that it's getting much cheaper to buy produce locally. Take a walk to your local farmers' market and stock up on fresh fruits and veggies for the week.
- ▶ At a barbeque, try a turkey or veggie burger instead of beef, and use a whole wheat bun or lettuce leaf. Or get rid of the bun entirely and make veggie, shrimp, or chicken skewers.

- ▶ Look for whole grain breads. Most hamburger and hotdog buns are processed and low in fiber, but many stores now carry wheat or whole-grain versions. This is a great way to add cholesterol-lowering fiber to your diet.
- ▶ Reward yourself with a cool treat – but cut the fat. Instead of ice cream, try a low-fat frozen yogurt for a boost of calcium. Italian ices are a great way to cool off without the fat. For a serving of fruit as well as a sweet treat, freeze a few bananas and grapes and eat right out of the freezer.
- ▶ Red wine (in moderation) is heart-healthy. Try mixing it with orange and pineapple juice for a refreshing sangria. Or, try a wine spritzer – just add some club soda.
- ▶ Drink plenty of water. Heat means that you will need more water than usual, even if you haven't increased your activity level. Aim to drink 8 glasses a day, and try to drink them BEFORE you get thirsty. Drinking water rather than soda or an alcoholic beverage also cuts calories.

You can make sure that you are healthy and ready to stay active everyday by avoiding heat-related illness. Steer clear of heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and skin damage while you're enjoying the summer sun by following these simple rules:

- ▶ Always use a sunscreen with SPF 15 or above when you will be outside. Make it a part of your morning routine to put on sunscreen or a moisturizer with sunscreen everyday. Even being outside for just a few minutes at a time can add up to skin damage over the course of a day. Wear sunglasses and a hat to keep your eyes safe from UV rays and to further protect your skin. Besides reducing the risk of skin cancer, you will be preventing premature aging.
- ▶ If you do get burned, use Aloe vera or a lotion designed to heal sunburns to soothe your skin. Try to stay out of the sun and drink plenty of water.
- ▶ See your doctor annually for a skin screening. They will check for any unusual spots or moles that could signify skin cancer. If you notice any suspicious marks in between screenings, see your doctor.
- ▶ Exercise in the morning or the evening during the cooler hours of the day. Try to stay in the shade or indoors during the afternoon, when the sun is at the highest point in the sky and the heat is most intense.
- ▶ Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing whenever you can, but especially when exercising, to keep your skin cool.
- ▶ Remember to stay hydrated! If you are going to be outside and sweating, drink water and also add a sports drink to help replace the salt and nutrients that you are losing.

Remember to consult a physician before beginning any fitness routine and to learn about any special dietary restrictions that you might have. For more tips on exercises, recipes, and heart-health, visit the NVFC Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program web site at www.healthy-firefighter.org.

Sources: The NVFC Heart-Healthy Firefighter Program; WebMD.com; and Sparkpeople.com

Find more health and wellness tips and resources for first responders at www.healthy-firefighter.org.