



Coping Strategies

for American Heart Month

Heart disease is one of the biggest health concerns we will face in our lifetime. In 2021, one in five deaths in America were the result of heart disease. It also presents an especially difficult problem because it often develops without any visible symptoms, making it more challenging to detect and diagnose.

As always, one of the best steps we can take to protect ourselves is preventive care. Exercising regularly, eating healthy and receiving regular check-ups are all beneficial measures you can adopt. Another major way you can protect your heart is through stress management.

Stress is something we all encounter, and it's something we all deal with differently. Our bodies handle stress in a way that's meant to protect us, but chronic stress and your body's subsequent response can quickly become harmful. Cortisol, a hormone, is released in response to stress, and studies suggest that high levels of it can increase your blood cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar and blood pressure, all of which are common heart disease risk factors.

With stress being such an ever-present part of the human experience, how can we begin to actually chip away at the negative effects it has on our bodies and minds? Try out the following grounding tips and techniques to find new ways to be more present and mindful in all the moments of your life, both good and bad.

Grounding yourself can be a difficult process, and what helps relieve stress for one of us likely might not work for the other. Give yourself the chance to try out new strategies, to learn from your mistakes and to truly find what works for you.

TRULY SAVOR A SNACK. Stress might sometimes lead us to turn toward junk food or overindulgence, but a more positive strategy is to slowly take small bites or sips of a food or drink you enjoy, allowing yourself to really taste and enjoy each bite.

MOVE YOUR BODY. It really doesn't matter how you're moving. Whether it's jumping rope, targeted stretching or an impromptu dance party to your favorite song, the act of physical exercise can do a world of good for your mind and body, releasing feel-good endorphins and helping you focus on one specific task. Make sure to really pay attention to how your body feels with each movement.

TRY THE 5-4-3-2-1 METHOD. As one of the most popular and accessible mindfulness strategies, the 5-4-3-2-1 method can be done almost anywhere at any time. Simply use your five senses to ground you in the present moment. First, name 5 things you can see. Then: 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

USE AFFIRMATIONS. Simple, positive, gentle reminders like, "I am safe," "This too shall pass," or "Fear is just a feeling," can help calm you down in a time of need, but can do even more good over time if you get in the habit of repeating them regularly so that you're used to hearing them.

DISTRACT YOURSELF. Sometimes it's easier said than done, but try to put all your energy and thought into one activity, like reading a book, playing a memory game, or playing an album you've never heard before and really listening to the words. Then you can approach the problem again, hopefully this time with a clearer head and a more positive mindset.

PLAN. When things are out of our control, we often feel immense anxiety and dread. Place yourself back in the moment and address what you can control by planning a fun outing or your meals and schedule for the week.

"Heart Disease Facts." cdc.gov, May 15, 2023.



Zucchini Chickpea Veggie Burgers

Prep Time: 25 minutes Cook Time: 25 minutes Serves: 4

Ingredients

- 1 (15 ounce) can no-salt-added chickpeas, rinsed
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 2 teaspoons white miso
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ¾ teaspoon onion powder
- ¼ cup fresh parsley leaves
- 2 teaspoons fresh chives, chopped
- ½ cup shredded zucchini
- ⅓ cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 whole-grain hamburger buns, toasted
- 1 cup packed fresh arugula
- 4 slices tomato

Instructions

1. In a food processor, combine the chickpeas, cumin, salt, tahini, miso, garlic powder, black pepper and onion powder. Pulse, stopping once or twice to scrape down the sides, until a coarse mixture forms that holds together. Add the parsley and chives. Pulse until the herbs are finely chopped and thoroughly combined. Transfer the mixture to a bowl.
2. Squeeze out the extra moisture in the zucchini in a clean kitchen towel. Add the zucchini and oats to the chickpea mixture.
3. Using your hands to combine, press the mixture together and form it into four patties.
4. Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the patties and cook until they are golden and beginning to crisp (about 4 to 5 minutes). Carefully flip the patties and cook them until they are golden brown, about 2 to 4 minutes more.
5. Serve the patties on hamburger buns, topped with arugula and tomato slices.

Nutrition Info Per Serving: 312 calories, 11g total fat, 2g saturated fat, 549mg sodium, 42g total carbohydrates, 8g dietary fiber, 4g sugar, 12g protein

Recipe adapted from: [eatingwell.com](https://www.eatingwell.com)

What to Eat And Not Eat WHEN YOU'RE SICK

Eating a variety of foods to achieve a balanced diet most days can make all the difference in preventing us from getting sick. But when we do catch a germ, balanced nutrition can help us recover quickly. And, unfortunately, some food options might worsen symptoms. Here's the rundown on nutrition when you're run down:

- Our bodies need a balance of protein, carbs, vitamins and minerals along with plenty of fluids for repair and to fight infection.
- Consuming a variety of nutritious foods that decrease inflammation and increase antioxidant activity can help support the immune response.
- Avoiding options that lead to dehydration can help encourage recovery.

Foods to Have on Hand for Sick Days

Canned or frozen homemade soup, broths: offer a balance of the nutrients and liquids our bodies need to fight infection

Gelatin mixes, popsicles and fruit juice: can help prevent dehydration

Crackers or bread/toast: are gentle carb options for energy to help get your body back to where it needs to be

Bananas and avocados: are packed with vital nutrients for recovery and can help reverse diarrhea symptoms.



Foods to Avoid When Sick

When your body is fighting infection, things aren't the same as usual. Spicy foods that don't usually bother your belly might cause irritation when you're sick. Here are a few food categories to avoid when under the weather:

Fried or greasy foods: can be tough to digest

Spicy foods: can irritate the stomach

Sugary foods or drinks: can slow recovery because they are nutrient-deficient

Caffeine: can contribute to dehydration and prevent restful sleep

Eating a balance of the right foods when we're sick can give us energy back, help us feel better and help us hydrate to recover quicker.



"The Best Foods to Eat When You're Sick," [clevelandclinic.org](https://www.clevelandclinic.org), Feb. 9, 2021.

"Eight Best Foods to Eat When Sick, According to Experts," [forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com), Sept. 22, 2023.