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There are genuine pleasures that accompany winter storms — walking through sparkling new-fallen snow, building a snowman with your kids, skating and skiing — and then there's shoveling. While snow shoveling does provide good exercise, the exertion during cold weather can also put unexpected extra stress on your heart that doesn't occur when it's warm outside. Follow these safety tips during the next storm, and if you have heart disease — or at least two risk factors for it — don't shovel without your doctor's permission. (Hey, it's a good excuse to get your older kids or neighborhood teens to help you out!)

Bundle up.

Cold air causes blood vessels to constrict as the body tries to prevent heat loss, and this can reduce blood flow to the heart and raise your blood pressure. So bust out your down coat, wool sweater, and your hat (the extensive blood supply in your head makes it a huge source of heat loss, so keep it covered).

Push, don't lift.

To put less stress on your heart, try using an ergonomically designed shovel that lets you push the snow instead of lifting it. And shovel during the storm so the snow doesn't get too deep before you have to clear it.

Start slowly, and rest often.

Rather than starting full-force, begin very slowly so your muscles get a chance to warm up. Every 10 minutes, take a two-minute break, (stand up straight, walk for a minute, and rest for a minute).

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Take it easy while shoveling, for your heart's sake.

Winter Weather Warning:

by Cleveland Clinic Wellness Editors



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Keeping your cool during difficult situations is a truly empowering feeling. And managing those moments effectively helps your heart stay strong and healthy too, no matter what your age or gender. However, if you're a woman with coronary heart disease, be especially diligent. Normally, stress prompts the heart to pump extra blood to the extremities so that you can run away or defend yourself — the classic fight-or-flight response. Women under 55, however, are also prone to reduced blood flow to the heart in times of mental stress — so it's important to learn how to manage challenging situations with daily practice. Physical exercise like walking or swimming can bring on a more relaxed state, as do mind-body practices such as yoga, tai chi or meditation. The key is to do something (or many things) regularly. Be sure to set aside time to feed your friendships too; close relationships have a protective effect on women's hearts.

Ladies, just say “Om”

For women in the prime of life, learning how to relax may be especially important for heart health.

By: Cleveland Clinic Wellness Editors

WEEKEND WELLNESS IDEA: GRAB A FRIEND FOR A WALK OUTDOORS AND ENJOY A POWERFUL TWOFER TOWARD BETTER HEALTH.



When you think about strengthening your muscles, you probably think first of weight training to build the muscles in your limbs and torso, or your skeletal muscles. Many people forget that the heart is also a muscle. Every time your heart beats, your cardiac muscles are contracting to pump blood, which carries oxygen and nutrients throughout your body. If your cardiac muscles become weak, your heart has to work twice as hard to move the blood. That's why you should always include exercises that help to increase the strength of your heart in your daily routine.

Cardiovascular exercise is the best way to ensure that you are giving your heart a real workout. During cardiovascular exercise your heart rate increases in order to deliver higher amounts of oxygen to your skeletal muscles. This in turn strengthens the cardiac muscles.

For heart health, it's recommended that you get 30 to 60 minutes of moderate cardiovascular activity most days of the week. Moderate activity is typically about 60 to 70 percent of your max heart rate. That means you're at a level where you can hold a conversation but have to pause every few sentences to take a breath. The wonderful thing about cardiovascular activity is that there are so many options for people of all ages and physical fitness levels. Walking, jogging, swimming, water aerobics, chair aerobics, and biking or cycling classes are all great activities to get your heart pumping.

Of course, always speak to a physician before starting any new exercise routine.

Give Your
a
Workout!

By: Melissa Hendricks, M.ED, ACSM-HFI, ACE

Healthy Recipe: Double Chocolate Icebox Cookies

This is one smart cookie! Packed with delectable dates and just enough dark chocolate, this cookie satisfies your sweet tooth without any white sugar! So you get the cardiovascular benefits of cocoa and dark chocolate without the health-robbing effects of stripped carbs. The best part: enjoying every last bite.



Servings: 24 cookies

Ingredients:

4 ounces Deglet dates (about 16)
1.5 ounces dark chocolate chips (about ¼ cup)
4 egg whites
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

Nutrition Info Per Serving:

(3 cookies) 110 calories, 3 g total fat, 2 g saturated fat,
6 g protein, 22 g carbohydrate, 6 g dietary fiber, 11 g sugar,
0 mg cholesterol, 50 mg sodium

Instructions:

Place the dates in a small bowl and cover with hot tap water. Let soak for 10 minutes until softened. Drain the water.

Place the softened dates in a food processor and puree until smooth. Add the chocolate chips and pulse a few times to break them up. Add the egg whites and vanilla and pulse a few times to combine. Add the cocoa powder and pulse to combine. The dough will be thick and a bit sticky.

Tear off a large piece of plastic wrap and lay it flat on the counter. Place the dough in the center and shape into a log. Roll up the dough in the plastic wrap and continue to shape until the dough is a smooth log, about 1¼ inches in diameter. Freeze for 2 hours or more, until the dough is firm and sliceable. (The dough will last in the freezer for up to 3 weeks).

When you are ready to bake, heat the oven to 350°F. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper. Unwrap the dough and slice into ¼-inch thick coins. Bake until just set, about 8 minutes. Serve warm.

Developed by: Sara Quessenberry for Cleveland Clinic Wellness