

## **Baby Steps To Better Health**

**By**

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**The NEW 8-Week Cholesterol Cure**

Think about the years when you were young. You probably were very active, playing a lot of games and perhaps sports throughout the year. The majority of adults today were not overweight as children. And we certainly didn't think about health issues including cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes, and stress.

Wouldn't it be nice to recapture the health of our youth? To be filled with energy all day and to sleep soundly throughout the night? Other than the occasional cold or flu, most of us were pretty healthy. Then, as we got older, health concerns began to emerge.

The good news is that we can, to a remarkable degree, turn back the hands of time. We can do so by taking baby steps to better health. As the Chinese proverb states, a journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step. As we'll see, little things mean a lot.

### **Physical Activity**

For most people, exercise is a four-letter word, something we'd rather avoid. So let's throw that word out the window and think, instead, about physical activities that are fun either alone or with friends. Few adults will ever run a marathon, or even want to do so. But taking a walk through the colorful fallen leaves of autumn or newly fallen snow in winter is a joy.

Hippocrates wrote, many centuries ago, "Use it or lose it." Sure, he used more eloquent words, but the meaning then as now is the same. We have to continue to actively use our bodies to keep them performing optimally.

So what's enough? Years of research have given us a pretty accurate prescription. We all need at least thirty minutes of physical activity daily. Even so, that doesn't even mean we have to do all thirty minutes at once. Three ten-minute walks, or their equivalents, add up to our daily requirement. Park the car at the far end of the lot and walk. Climb stairs instead of using the elevator. Conversely, if one day finds us so busy that there isn't a spare minute, we can make up for that day of inactivity with more activity the next.

Walking is most often cited as the optimal physical activity for human adults. That doesn't mean a slow stroll while window shopping. To do our hearts and lungs and bodies the most good, walk briskly, as though we were late for an appointment. But walking is just one form of activity.

Let's get back to that wonderful word "fun." What fun things can you think of that get the body moving? Dancing, gardening, bicycle riding, swimming, are activities enjoyed by millions of men and women who don't think of them as exercise as much as simply having fun. And those things are even more fun when we do them with friends. Or return to games of youth such as skipping rope. Bring back the hula hoop!

Certainly we all have to work. So why not turn even mundane chores such as house cleaning into healthful physical activity? Just turn on some up-tempo music of your choice, from polka to oldies rock to gospel. Then mop that floor, vacuum the rug, and polish the furniture in time with the music to get your heart rate up and your breathing increased.

Don't forget: baby steps. If you've been sedentary for quite a while, increase your activity level and duration gradually. For some that might mean as little as a five-minute walk to the mail box or walking up one or two flights of stairs. Just get moving! You'll be amazed at how quickly you'll progress.

### **Weight Control in Baby Steps**

When it comes to weight, little things truly do mean a lot. And no one can write a diet book as well as you can. You put on those extra pounds one at a time and you can take them off the same way.

Start by writing that diet book. Keep a journal of everything you eat and drink for a week. Then read it critically, asking what foods you could most easily cut back on or completely eliminate. We all have different preferences. My wife simply must have a bit of something sweet after the evening meal or she's just not happy. On the other hand she can enjoy a small, low-calorie dessert as much as a massive slab of chocolate cake when she wants to fit into last year's dress.

To dramatically illustrate the truth behind the cliché that little things mean a lot, I often cite the experience of my late father-in-law, Ben. One day he announced to the family that he wanted to lose 12 pounds. Asked how he proposed to do that, he said that he'd drink his coffee black instead of with sugar. Everyone laughed, my wife told me. But let's look at that little change.

Ben drank four to five cups of coffee daily, each with two teaspoons of sugar. Sugar provides 16 calories per teaspoon. So every cup of coffee delivered 32 calories. Multiply that by four or five cups, for 128 to 160 calories daily. Then multiply that by 30 days and you'll get 3840 to 4800 calories a month. That's more than one pound of weight loss monthly. So in less than a year, Ben achieved his goal of losing 12 pounds.

Keep that food journal carefully. Read it after a week. Determine what baby step you can take to lose one pound at a time. Take two baby steps and lose two pounds a month. Or three. Or even four. That would mean up to a whopping 50-pound weight reduction in a year. That's impressive! And you can do it without any feeling of deprivation.

## Protecting Your Heart Health

Cardiovascular disease remains the nation's number one killer of both men and women. The "big four" risk factors are elevated cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cigarette smoking. Control those four and you greatly reduce your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

There's not much I can say to convince you to stop smoking. You know you should, but you don't want to. Or you say you can't do so. I don't have the ability to motivate you. Nor can your doctor, your spouse, your children, or your friends talk you into it. You alone can make the decision that you really, truly *want* to quit. When the time comes that you *want* to quit, your doctor can provide a lot of help in both overcoming the addiction and dealing with breaking the habit.

So let's look at those other three risk factors. First, find out if you're at risk. There are no symptoms of high cholesterol, hypertension, or elevated blood sugar, the beginnings of diabetes. So the initial "baby step" is to make an appointment at your doctor's office to get tests for all three. If the results are high for one or more factor, picture yourself on a railroad track with the train blowing its horn. Time to jump off those tracks, fast!

Once you've taken those baby steps toward weight loss and increased physical activity, you're already on your way to preventing type-2 diabetes. The vast majority of incidence of diabetes, which is reaching epidemic proportions, is caused by overweight and sedentary behavior. Lose weight, get active, and you slash your risk of developing this risk factor for not only cardiovascular disease but also blindness, kidney failure, and amputations of the extremities.

How about cholesterol? Although 80 percent of all the cholesterol in your bloodstream, which can lead to clogging of the arteries, is produced in the liver and levels are largely genetically determined, you can do a lot by improving your diet. Start by cutting back on saturated fat from fatty cuts of meats and full-fat dairy foods. Read food labels to learn about the trans fats from partially hydrogenated oils and select products that contain little or none of this type of fat that not only raises levels of the bad LDL cholesterol but also lowers the protective HDL cholesterol. Cut way back on deep-fried fast foods to greatly limit both saturated and trans fats.

Don't just focus on foods to avoid. Many foods actively lower cholesterol rather than raising it. Foods rich in soluble fiber, including oats, oat bran, barley, raisins and prunes and figs, and all sorts of beans, can do just that, by as much as eight to ten percent when eaten regularly. And today there's an ingredient, the plant sterols known as phytosterols, in many types of foods that also fight cholesterol.

Phytosterols are plant extracts that have a molecular structure remarkably similar to that of cholesterol. So similar, in fact, that the human body cannot tell the difference. When phytosterols enter the digestive tract, they're viewed as cholesterol, thus competing with

cholesterol for transport into the bloodstream. Literally hundreds of research studies have shown that consuming these plant sterols on a regular, daily basis can cut total cholesterol by six to ten percent and the bad LDL cholesterol by up to 12 and even 14 percent.

Blood pressure elevations respond very nicely to lifestyle modifications, including the baby steps we've already covered. You'll also want to not only reduce your salt and sodium intake but also balance that mineral with other electrolyte minerals including calcium, magnesium, and potassium that lower blood pressure. Foods rich in powerful antioxidants called polyphenols actively fight the so-called silent killer. Green tea and cocoa are loaded with those polyphenols. And what could be more pleasant and relaxing than a nightly cup of hot cocoa?

A baby step here, a baby step there, and you're well on your way to better health, sounder sleep, and a more enjoyable life. Finally, let me invite you to learn additional, easy baby steps on my website [www.thehealthyheart.net](http://www.thehealthyheart.net). Best wishes for a healthy, happy heart and good health!

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