

MY JUST-IN-TIME

# HEART-HEALTH WAKE-UP CALL

Consider this: 80 percent of heart disease cases can be prevented by eating right, exercising, and living healthy. Meet four women who decided it was time to take action, then follow our experts' advice to help protect your heart, too.

## MEET OUR

## EXPERT PANEL

We enlisted top medical experts to give advice on tackling the biggest challenges these women face on their paths to healthy.

**SUZANNE  
STEINBAUM, D.O.**

Director of Women's Heart Health at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York and national spokesperson for the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women campaign

**LEO POZUELO, M.D.**

Psychiatrist who works in preventive cardiology at the Cleveland Clinic

**RACHELE  
DEPENDAHL, R.D.N.**

Dietician and diabetes educator with Cedars-Sinai Medical Group in Los Angeles

**THOMAS  
ALLISON, PH.D.**

Director, Sports Cardiology Clinic at the Mayo Clinic

**FIONA  
BARWICK, PH.D.**

Clinical assistant professor, psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Stanford Sleep Medicine Center


**OUR  
EXPERTS'  
ADVICE**
**STICKING WITH  
EXERCISE**
**PACE YOURSELF**

Get a checkup from your doctor, then start out slow, says Thomas Allison, Ph.D. Begin with 15 minutes, increasing to 30 minutes five days a week. Then mix high and low intensity: Walk three minutes; jog one.

**KEEP EXERCISE  
INTERESTING**

Check out [classpass.com](http://classpass.com) to sample group classes in your area. Or sign up for streaming videos; [grokker.com](http://grokker.com) has a wide variety of workouts.

**STRENGTH TRAIN**

You can work it into everyday activities; anything that uses muscle power (carrying heavy grocery bags, moving bags of soil) counts. Aim for 10-15 minutes twice a week.

## “MY *FRIEND* HAD A HEART ATTACK.”



**CAROL DAVIS, 50**, had been overweight most of her life, but she didn't think it was a big deal. “For years, the doctor told me that I had a few ‘almost’ conditions: prediabetes and borderline high blood pressure. I got the same news every year, so I figured that at least it wasn't getting worse,” she says. But when a friend

died from a heart attack in early 2016, Carol panicked. “She seemed healthy and had kids around the same age as mine. When I was hugging her 17-year-old daughter at the memorial service, it hit me that this could've been me.”  
*Her biggest challenge:* staying active. “I'd go to the gym in spurts, but never enjoyed it.” And though she's been wearing a step counter, she rarely got her heart rate up. “I'd go for strolls, but never broke a sweat,” she says. Knowing she'd be more likely to push herself if she had support, she joined the American Heart Association's #GoRedGetFit Facebook page. She's already walking briskly, with a little jogging mixed in, and is hoping to work her way up to a 5K.

## “I THOUGHT I WAS HAVING A *STROKE*.”



**WHEN CHINASA ELUE, 31,** felt chest pains one night as she was getting ready for bed last year, she knew something was off. “I went to the ER, and tests confirmed that I wasn’t having a stroke or heart attack, but my blood pressure was sky-high.” Realizing that a stressful job environment was

part of the issue, Chinasa set out to find another job. After a few months, she accepted a professorship in Atlanta (closer to her extended family) and started eating better and exercising more. Her blood pressure improved dramatically, but she knows she still has work to do. “I’m combating diseases that run in my family, like stroke and diabetes, and I’m always looking for ways to maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle.”

*Her biggest challenge:* controlling cravings. “My downfall is sweets, especially when life gets hectic,” she admits. “I might be eating really well all day, but if I get stressed, I’ll grab something sweet.”

### OUR EXPERTS’ ADVICE

#### CONTROLLING CRAVINGS

##### SIP FIRST

It’s easy to confuse thirst with hunger, so before reaching for a cookie, drink a glass or two of water. Your hunger will dissipate, and you’ll have time to make a healthy choice instead.

##### EAT MINDFULLY

Pause between bites, and stop halfway through a meal to ask if you’re still hungry. Afterward, think about how you feel: energized and satisfied, or bloated and tired? Homing in on these physical feelings will help you adjust your eating without feeling deprived, explains Rachele Dendahl, R.D.N.

### OUR EXPERTS’ ADVICE

#### CALMING YOUR MIND AND BODY

##### MEDITATE TO EASE STRESS

You don’t need a lot of time or training, says Leo Pozuelo, M.D. Pick a method—an app for a guided relaxation, deep breathing during yoga—and make time daily to practice.

##### PREP FOR SLEEP

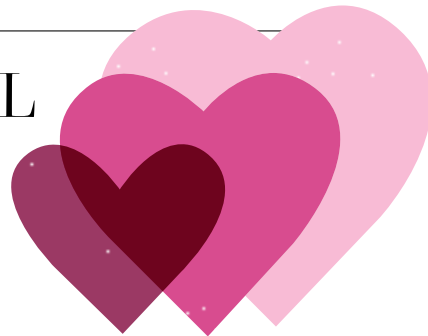
Keep the bedroom cool (68 is ideal), quit caffeine by 2 p.m., and go to bed and wake up at the same time. If you wake up and can’t fall asleep after 20 minutes, get out of bed until you’re sleepy. “Your bed should be associated with sleep, not lying awake,” says Fiona Barwick, Ph.D.

## “MY CHOLESTEROL SUDDENLY WENT UP, AND I STARTED TO *GAIN WEIGHT*.”



**TOBY AMIDOR, 41,** is a registered dietician, so she knows about eating healthy. But a recent divorce took a toll on her good habits, leading to a weight gain of nearly 20 pounds. “It was a really difficult time, and I became very stressed out so I took anti-anxiety medication for a bit,” Toby says. “I also started having trouble sleeping, which led to fatigue that may have changed my eating.” When a checkup revealed that her LDL cholesterol had crept up, a red light went off: “My father and brother also have high cholesterol, and my grandfather died of a heart attack when he was 60.”

*Her biggest challenge:* getting a handle on stress and sleeping better. Recent research shows that stress and poor sleep can increase your risk of a heart attack. Although some stress is unavoidable, learning to control it means it won’t chip away at your emotional and physical health or deprive your body of the rest it needs. “I have a busy job and three kids. I can’t help but worry,” Toby says. “I’m often awake at 3 a.m. and can’t get back to sleep for about an hour and a half.”





“I WAS SHOCKED TO LEARN I HAD *GESTATIONAL DIABETES.*”



**MIKELL REED CAROLL, 39**, was slim, working out three or four times a week, and eating what she thought was a not-so-bad diet. “The gestational diabetes diagnosis was alarming, and the doctor explained that it could not only impact my baby’s health, but also my

heart disease and diabetes risk later in life,” Mikell says. “My grandmother and great-grandmother both died of heart attacks, and my mother has survived two.” Mikell quickly got her blood sugar under control. Now a working mom to a healthy 2-year-old son, she wants to make sure she stays on the right path.

*Her biggest challenge:* figuring out how to eat healthy on a busy schedule. “My husband and I often pick up food on the way home from work,” Mikell says. “And now I realize it was probably too often and not all that healthy.” She also admits that she doesn’t want to spend time cooking that she could be spending with her son. “Now that I’m working full-time again, I only get to see him about two-and-a-half-hours a day.”

LIFE SUPPORT

These organizations are dedicated to raising awareness about heart disease in women and providing the info and tools for a heart-healthy life.

**GO RED FOR WOMEN**

Follow the American Heart Association’s #GoRedGetFit movement on Facebook for extra motivation to get healthy. [goredforwomen.org](http://goredforwomen.org)

**WOMENHEART**

WomenHeart connects people with heart disease to support groups in their area. [womenheart.org](http://womenheart.org)

**OUR EXPERTS’ ADVICE**

**EATING HEALTHY WHEN YOU’RE BUSY INVEST IN A SLOW COOKER**

It makes for easy healthy meals. Use recipes with lean protein and lots of vegetables. Toss them in the pot before work; dinner’s ready when you get home.

**TAKE SHORTCUTS WITH VEGGIES**

Ready-to-eat versions may cost more, but less than takeout.

**HAVE A PLAN B**

Frozen dinners can be healthy, especially with extra vegetables and a salad, says Rachele Dependahl, R.D.N. Choose meals with roughly 400 calories, 15 g protein, 5 g fiber, less than 600 mg sodium, and less than 4 g sat fat.



**HEART STRONG**

TRACK YOUR HEART RATE

Know how hard you’re exercising: For a rough estimate of your max heart rate, subtract your age from 220. When working out, try to stay in the aerobic zone (60 to 80 percent of your max) to boost fitness and burn fat, says John P. Higgins, M.D., sports psychologist at McGovern Medical School, University of Texas, Houston.

**1 Polar A360**

The gold standard of heart rate monitors, it also tracks calories and overall activity. And it’s waterproof. (\$199.95; [polar.com](http://polar.com))

**2 Samsung Gear Fit2**

It can tell what you’re doing—walking or pedaling—and stores up to 500 songs. (\$179.99; [samsung.com](http://samsung.com))

**3 Fitbit Charge 2**

High-tech and high fashion, the Charge 2 tracks heart rate, steps, calories burned, floors climbed, and more. (\$129.95; [fitbit.com](http://fitbit.com))

**4 Garmin Forerunner**

GPS technology tracks pace. Runners can use the 235 to train. (\$199.99 for the 35, \$329.99 for the 235; [garmin.com](http://garmin.com)). ■