



## TAKE THE LEAP: CHANGE YOUR LIFESTYLE, CHANGE YOUR HEART

It's one thing to call each February "Heart Month" and spend a little more time thinking about your heart and your risks for heart disease. It's another thing to really make a commitment to changing your lifestyle so you can change your heart's health.

With leap year upon us, though, it seems like a great time to take that leap. And that "leap" really just means starting to take a few basic steps that, when added together, can make a big difference in your heart's life.

### **Start Small, But Start Now**

Now is the time to start taking those small steps. "Don't wait until you have a heart attack," advises **Anabel Facemire**, a cardiologist with Northwest Regional Heart & Vascular.

And these lifestyle changes aren't just for people with the biggest risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Dr. Facemire points out that it doesn't take a 90 percent blockage of an artery to put you in danger of a heart attack. "Half of heart attacks occur in people with a 40 percent blockage," she explains. "The inflammatory process breaks of the plaques."



These plaques, or sticky deposits that adhere to the walls of your blood vessels, become clots that cause heart attacks and strokes. And what we eat can increase both the plaques in our blood vessels and the inflammation that causes them to break off.

Fortunately, making some basic changes in your lifestyle for just three weeks can make a big difference. Dr. Facemire tells many of her patients, “I can give you medication, or you can commit to three weeks on a plant-based diet.”

And the ones who take her up on the offer find they often have big successes—from plummeting cholesterol levels and blood pressure to improved breath and an increased ability to engage in heart-healthy activity.

## A Three-Week Change in Diet

Dr. Facemire is a big believer in the ability of plant-based nutrition to make a difference in people’s health. That belief comes from both how it’s worked for her patients as well as her own son, who went from chronic trips to the emergency room with asthma and ear infections to enjoying a healthy, happy childhood by eating a more nutritious diet.

 Dr. Anabel Facemire

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cardiologist with  
Northwest Regional Heart  
and Vascular

### 6 changes to your meal plans can make a big difference:

1. **Have beans every day**—any kind will do, but eat at least a cup per day, and put some on a salad if you like
2. **Eat the rainbow**—have a big salad of mixed dark-green leafy vegetables and add other colors of veggies, like orange peppers, green cucumbers, purple cabbage, red tomatoes and various berries...and add a drizzle of balsamic vinegar rather than pouring fat-laden prepared salad dressing on top
3. **Add berries every day**—add them to salads, enjoy them plain, or make a smoothie from frozen berries, a handful of spinach, a banana and a some plant-based “milk” (like soy, hemp or almond milk)...and don’t forget to add a tablespoon of ground flax seed or chia seeds
4. **Pom-per yourself**—have some pomegranate four times each week, either by adding some pure pomegranate juice to your smoothie or by adding pomegranate arils (those little “jewels” inside the pomegranate’s leathery skin) to your salads
5. **Veg out**—be sure lunch and dinner includes some heart-healthy steamed or roasted vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, cabbage or Brussels sprouts
6. **Go nuts**—by making sure your food plan includes 10 plain almonds every day

Dr. Facemire also advocates starting each day with two glasses of warm water with lemon to kickstart your digestion and awaken your brain. “Brains needs lots of water,” she adds.

Her plan also suggests avoiding refined sugars and junk food and adding a variety of whole grains like quinoa, wild rice and couscous.

## Getting Health on Your Plate

The basic problem, says Dr. Facemire, is that we have to start actually putting healthy foods on our plates. “This isn’t about suffering,” she says. “This is about the rest of your life. It’s about having the right approach.”

And the right approach doesn’t mean feeling constantly deprived. “What lasts is when you have pleasure,” Dr. Facemire explains. “When you feel so good, you don’t go back.”

Which also means she doesn’t tell her patients they can never have a favorite food or desserts. She just advises them to think of those things as treats instead of using them to fuel their bodies full-time.

## Planning Meals for Health and Wealth

Getting those heart-healthy beans, greens, nuts and fruits on your plate and avoiding last-minute decisions to grab junk or processed foods takes some advance planning and shopping, but the benefits of meal planning extend even beyond health.

Eating at home and shopping from a grocery list also saves you money—by avoiding impulse items the store or expensive take-out from restaurants. And filling your fridge and pantry with heart-healthy foods while skipping the junk will help you make good eating choices when you’re reaching for a snack.

Many of us don’t feel good, Dr. Facemire points out. But we tend to just cruise along, doing what we always do—“especially moms,” Dr. Facemire adds. She sees vanloads of families with kids headed through fast-food drive-thrus, racing from school to sports and collapsing in bed with little nutrition to fuel their busy days. “It’s out of balance,” she says.

Making a weeklong plan can improve that balance. “You’re the one driving this,” Dr. Facemire says.



### SHOPPING LIST

- tomatoes
- spinach
- red pepper
- whole-wheat rolls
- black beans

Try planning seven days of meals at once and map out your grocery list accordingly. Or take a few minutes to look at the weekly sales at your favorite grocer and plan your heart-healthy, plant-based meals around the week's best prices. The U.S. Department of Agriculture offers [additional ways to help you stick to your list and budget at the grocery store](#).

Think through your week and plan for those times you simply don't have time to cook. Develop menus based around your real schedule.

It's also important to plan for snacks, both at home and away. You'll be less likely to consume empty calories if you're prepared with stashes of baby carrots, sliced apples, celery sticks and plain almonds.

But be firm in your resolve to stick to your list once you're at the store. Sometimes that means shopping alone, so you don't face the nonstop begging of little voices clamoring for the sugary treats often placed right at pint-size eye-level.

## What Goes In Must Go Out

In addition to eating a heart-healthy diet, giving your heart a muscle-worthy workout will go a long way toward its health and long life.

About 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity most days is [recommended by the American Heart Association](#) for basic heart health.

When you make sure the calories you're consuming each day are headed out again through physical activity, you'll be maintaining your weight too. Many of us need to adjust that balance even more to use up additional calories and move our Body Mass Index and waist circumference down to a healthy range.

Most people also find that adding more physical activity—especially when it includes some outdoor time—improves their overall mood and reduces stress.

## Time Well-Spent for Your Heart

True, it takes a bit of time to plan a week's worth of menus and grocery lists. And it takes a chunk of time most days to get the exercise you need.

But that is time well-spent, considering your real goal is to add years to your life.

While Dr. Facemire offers some basic steps you can try for a few weeks toward a heart-healthy, plant-rich diet, you may also want to discuss your particular health needs and risks with your health care provider. He or she may add some ideas or even suggest you visit with a registered dietician or join a nutrition group for more support.

And remember: When life conspires to pull you off your menu, you can still make healthy, plant-based choices at a lot of restaurants. There are even an ever-increasing number of plant-based restaurants, including the **LivingWell Bistro** located in Adventist Medical Center's Pavilion or the **Creekside Café** located in Walla Walla General Hospital.

So start your leap today with just one or two small steps toward a better lifestyle by planning a week of meals, a week of physical activities...and a lifetime of heart health.



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