

Helping Patients Optimize Cardiovascular Health in an Era of Social Distancing

Anandita Kulkarni, Ann Liebeskind, Aneesha Thobani, Anne Goldberg

The current era of social distancing has created novel challenges as individuals and enterprises are learning to navigate the difficult task of finding a new norm. Social distancing presents an opportunity to reflect on our personal and professional goals and to optimize our cardiovascular health. We present here several tips on counseling patients on how to maintain a healthy heart in these trying times.

Staying Active: The 2019 guideline on primary prevention recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week. There are many ways in which one can remain active while maintaining social distance. Even without access to a professional gym, there are ways to stay in shape.

1. Taking walks, going for a run, or cycling provides opportunities for physical fitness and also allow for getting fresh air, seeing new sights, and having glimpses of friends and neighbors from a safe distance.
2. Fitness apps and online videos that range from yoga to Zumba, and high-intensity interval training are available.
3. Physically intensive chores such as gardening and yardwork can be good exercise and can help with stress reduction.

Physical activity in the era of social distancing does not have to be devoid of social contact. Workout routines may be completed virtually with friends and family to provide motivation and encouragement to all. Staying active has long- term beneficial effects on blood pressure, cholesterol levels, weight loss, and stress levels. This is the perfect time for starting a new workout routine.

This NLA patient tear sheet summarizes tips for physical activity:

https://www.lipid.org/sites/default/files/tearsheet_physicalactivity.pdf

Eating Healthy: Social distancing provides a prime opportunity to focus on preparing heart healthy meals at home. This is a great time to learn and to try out new recipes and to be in control of one's dietary intake. Here are a few resources that patients may use for simple, heart healthy meal options:

The American Heart Association provides online heart healthy recipes across various categories:

<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/company-collaboration/heart-check-certification/heart-check-certified-recipes>

This NLA tear sheet lists tips for planning heart healthy meals:

https://www.lipid.org/sites/default/files/tearsheet_nutrition.pdf

Mental health: The importance of mental health for patients and providers alike cannot be stressed enough during these trying times.

1. Try to keep a daily routine. Set a schedule for the day or week that includes a mix of fun and productive activities. Be sure to mix it up to keep things interesting.
2. Stay connected. This is a great time to connect, catch up with, and support friends and family. Share thoughts and experiences, play virtual games, or start a virtual book club!

3. It is understandable to feel frustrated at times. Reach out to friends and family to help support you through this time. If more serious feelings of depression or anxiety arise, contact your healthcare provider for assistance.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides pointers to patients on taking care of behavioral health: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>