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7 Evidence-Based Habits That Help Protect Your Heart, Liver and Long-Term Health

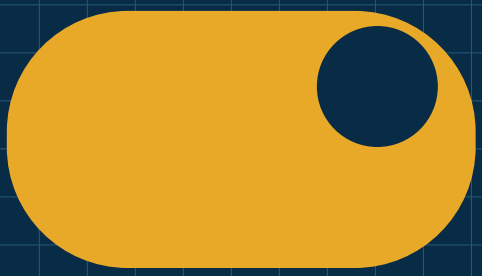
A clear, practical guide to the everyday choices that matter most

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Dr Ekram Explains





Health protection starts with ordinary choices

Your heart and liver work together every minute. The heart delivers oxygen and nutrients. The liver processes food, medicines and alcohol, regulates energy, and removes waste. The same habits that protect one often help the other.

> The core idea
> You do not need a perfect lifestyle. Choose one useful action, repeat it, and build from there. Consistency usually matters more than an occasional burst of enthusiasm.

The seven habits at a glance

1	EAT WELL Make minimally processed foods the centre of most meals.
2	MOVE OFTEN Build toward 150 to 300 minutes of moderate activity each week.
3	AVOID TOBACCO Stopping smoking benefits health at every age.
4	DRINK LESS ALCOHOL Less alcohol means less risk to the liver and long-term health.
5	KNOW YOUR NUMBERS Check blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose.
6	PRIORITISE SLEEP Most adults function best with about 7 to 9 hours.
7	PROTECT YOUR LIVER Prevent hepatitis and use medicines and supplements carefully.

This guide supports general education. Your personal plan may need to change if you have heart disease, liver disease, diabetes, kidney disease, pregnancy, frailty or medicines that affect exercise, glucose, blood pressure or bleeding.

1 EAT WELL

Give your body better building materials

A healthy dietary pattern is more useful than chasing a single superfood. Build most meals from vegetables, fruit, legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds and suitable protein. Choose unsaturated fats such as olive oil more often, and limit heavily processed foods, sugary drinks, processed meat and excess salt.

What the evidence shows

In the PREDIMED randomised trial, Mediterranean dietary patterns supplemented with olive oil or nuts reduced major cardiovascular events among adults at high cardiovascular risk. Healthy eating and weight reduction can also reduce liver fat and improve metabolic health.

A simple plate guide

1/2 PLATE	Vegetables and salad. Use several colours across the week.
1/4 PLATE	Protein such as fish, legumes, eggs, tofu, yoghurt or lean meat.
1/4 PLATE	Whole grains or other high-fibre carbohydrate, adjusted for your needs.

Try this week

- Add one extra vegetable to your main meal.
- Replace one sugary drink with water, sparkling water or unsweetened tea.
- Plan one meal around beans, lentils or chickpeas.
- Check food labels for sodium, added sugar and saturated fat.

Do not be fooled by detox marketing

Your liver already processes and removes many waste products. A restrictive cleanse or expensive tea cannot replace balanced eating, movement, sleep and appropriate medical care.

2 MOVE OFTEN

Every minute of movement counts

Regular activity lowers cardiovascular risk, improves insulin sensitivity and can reduce liver fat. Adults should work toward 150 to 300 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each week, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous activity, plus strength work on at least two days.

The talk test
Moderate activity makes you breathe faster, but you can still speak in sentences. A brisk walk is a good example. If you are inactive, begin with 5 to 10 minutes and increase gradually.

- Walk for 10 minutes after one meal each day.
- Stand and move for a few minutes after prolonged sitting.
- Use stairs when this is safe and comfortable.
- Add two short strength sessions using weights, resistance bands or body weight.

3 AVOID TOBACCO AND NICOTINE

Stopping helps at every age

Smoking damages blood vessels, encourages clotting, raises cardiovascular risk and causes cancer and lung disease. In large cohort studies, continuing smokers lost more than 10 years of life expectancy compared with people who never smoked. Quitting earlier gives the greatest benefit, but quitting later still matters.

Aim for complete cessation
Smoking fewer cigarettes may reduce some exposure, but complete cessation provides clearer cardiovascular benefit. Effective help can include behavioural support and approved medicines.

Your next step

- Choose a quit date or speak with your GP or pharmacist.
- Remove tobacco products and identify your common triggers.
- Tell one supportive person about your plan.
- If you have tried before, use what you learned. A previous attempt is experience, not failure.

4 DRINK LESS ALCOHOL

Lower exposure means lower risk

Alcohol is processed mainly by the liver. Frequent or heavy drinking can contribute to fatty liver, hepatitis, cirrhosis, high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms, stroke and several cancers. Alcohol should not be started for heart protection.

> Australian guidance
> For healthy adults who choose to drink, the Australian guideline recommends no more than 10 standard drinks per week and no more than 4 on any one day. These are risk-reduction limits, not targets. Some people should avoid alcohol completely.

Practical actions

- Schedule alcohol-free days.
- Count standard drinks rather than glasses.
- Alternate alcohol with water.
- Do not save the weekly allowance for one occasion.

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5 KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Silent risks are still real risks

High blood pressure, LDL cholesterol and blood glucose may cause no early symptoms. Checking them can uncover treatable risk before a heart attack, stroke or organ damage occurs.

MEASURE	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT TO DO
Blood pressure	Persistent elevation damages arteries, heart, brain and kidneys.	Measure correctly and discuss repeated high readings.
Cholesterol	LDL contributes to plaque formation in arteries.	Interpret results with your overall cardiovascular risk.
Blood glucose	Diabetes can damage the heart, kidneys, eyes and nerves.	Use individual targets if diabetes or prediabetes is present.

A number becomes useful when it leads to an appropriate plan. Targets should be individualised with a health professional.

6 PRIORITISE SLEEP

Sleep is active maintenance

Most adults need about 7 to 9 hours of sleep. Sleep supports blood pressure, glucose regulation, appetite, mood and concentration. Short sleep and poor-quality sleep are consistently associated with worse cardiometabolic health.

Duration is only part of sleep health
Regular timing, good continuity, daytime alertness and freedom from untreated sleep disorders also matter. Long sleep can sometimes signal illness rather than cause it.

Build a steadier sleep routine

+ Keep wake time reasonably consistent.
+ Reduce bright screens and stimulating work before bed.
+ Keep the bedroom dark, quiet and comfortable.
+ Seek advice for loud snoring, witnessed pauses in breathing or persistent daytime sleepiness.

7 PROTECT YOUR LIVER

Prevent infection and avoid unnecessary harm

Hepatitis B can cause chronic liver disease, cirrhosis and liver cancer. Vaccination programmes have produced major reductions in childhood liver cancer. Hepatitis B and C may remain silent for years, so screening should be based on clinical guidance and personal risk.

Medicines and supplements
Prescription medicines, over-the-counter products, herbal remedies and bodybuilding or weight-loss supplements can cause liver injury. Follow recommended doses and tell your clinician or pharmacist about everything you take.

Protective actions

+ Check your hepatitis B vaccination status.
+ Ask whether hepatitis B or C screening is appropriate for you.
+ Never share needles or equipment that may contain blood.
+ Avoid combining products with overlapping ingredients, especially paracetamol.
+ Stop and seek medical advice if a new product is followed by jaundice, dark urine, severe nausea or marked fatigue.

Your seven-day starter plan

Choose actions that are small enough to repeat. Tick each box when completed. If a day does not go to plan, continue with the next action. Health does not require a perfect attendance record.

[ ]	DAY 1 Food	Add vegetables to one meal and choose water instead of one sugary drink.
[ ]	DAY 2 Movement	Take a 10-minute brisk walk or perform another suitable activity.
[ ]	DAY 3 Tobacco	If you smoke, write down one reason to quit and contact a support service.
[ ]	DAY 4 Alcohol	Choose an alcohol-free day and check what one standard drink looks like.
[ ]	DAY 5 Numbers	Record your latest blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose results, or plan a check.
[ ]	DAY 6 Sleep	Set a realistic bedtime and wake time that allow at least seven hours.
[ ]	DAY 7 Liver	Check hepatitis vaccination records and review supplements or unnecessary products.

At the end of the week

Circle the action that felt easiest. Repeat it next week. Choose one additional action only when the first one feels manageable.

My personal health plan

Write one action for each area. Keep your goals specific and realistic.

AREA	MY NEXT ACTION	WHEN
Food	_____	_____
Movement	_____	_____
Tobacco	_____	_____
Alcohol	_____	_____
Health numbers	_____	_____
Sleep	_____	_____
Liver protection	_____	_____

A useful goal has three parts

WHAT	I will walk after dinner.
HOW MUCH	For 10 minutes.
WHEN	On Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

My main goal for the next two weeks

_____

_____

The person who can support me: _____

When to seek medical advice

Routine prevention belongs in primary care. Arrange a review if you have repeated high blood pressure readings, abnormal cholesterol or glucose results, persistent sleep problems, concern about alcohol or tobacco use, possible hepatitis exposure, or abnormal liver tests.

Seek urgent medical care

Call emergency services for chest pressure or pain, severe shortness of breath, sudden weakness or speech difficulty, collapse, vomiting blood, black stools, new confusion, or rapidly developing jaundice with severe illness.

Seven habits, one connected system

These habits reinforce one another. Movement can improve sleep and glucose. Better sleep can support food choices. Less alcohol reduces pressure on the liver and may improve blood pressure. Smoking cessation improves circulation. Monitoring reveals problems early enough to act.

The goal is not to collect seven perfect habits. The goal is to create a pattern that protects your health over years.

Your one-step commitment

This week I will: _____

I will do it on: _____

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Educational information only. This guide does not replace diagnosis or personalised care from your own health professional.

Evidence and further reading

Selected references are formatted in APA 7 style. The evidence base includes randomised trials, systematic reviews, prospective cohorts and major clinical guidance.

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