

# VitaMin

Vital health information in a minute

## NEED A HUG? IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR HEART



A warm hug can lift your mood and relieve stress. But did you know that hugs, laughter and warm fuzzies can also help lower blood pressure and protect your heart?

**Hug a loved one.** Hugging someone you care about gives a positive boost to the brain, the heart and other body systems. Research suggests that hugs can increase levels of oxytocin (a feel-good hormone) and lower blood pressure.<sup>1</sup> Being a hugger may have a positive and protective effect on the heart.

**Laugh it up.** Laughter and a sense of humor may help protect against heart attacks. Mental stress, anger and hostility may contribute to fat and cholesterol build-up in the coronary arteries that can lead to a heart attack.<sup>2</sup> Laughter is good medicine, so find a funny movie or have a game night with family or friends.

**Tap into your social network.** Heart-healthy lifestyles can spread through social networks with positive results. Changing your diet and lifestyle can be a challenge, especially if you're trying to lose weight or quit smoking. It's easier when you share your experience with a group of supportive friends and family.

**Snuggle a pet.** Spending time with a furry friend can help you relax and also decrease your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.<sup>3</sup> Pets can help you get exercise and stay positive, too.

#### Sources:

1. Psychosomatic Medicine. "Effects of partner support on resting oxytocin, cortisol, norepinephrine, and blood pressure before and after warm partner contact." 2005 Jul-Aug. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16046364?dopt=Abstract> (accessed April 16, 2014)
2. University of Maryland Medical Center. "Laughter is the Best Medicine for Your Heart," July 14, 2014. <http://umm.edu/news-and-events/news-releases/2009/laughter-is-the-best-medicine-for-your-heart> (accessed April 15, 2014)
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Health Benefits of Pets." <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/health-benefits/index.html> (accessed August 8, 2014)

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