



the *health* nut

Our intrepid health director, **Amy Brightfield**, pours her heart out to a cardiologist.

February is women's heart-health awareness month, and as your resident health nut, I felt it was my duty to get a full-on heart-health check from a cardiologist who specializes in women. Consider it a guide of sorts to what your internist should be going over during your annual exams.

Before I even saw Stacey Rosen, M.D., with the Women's Heart Health Program at the Katz Institute for Women's Health in New York, I filled out an eight-page(!) questionnaire. It not only covered my medical history but also my eating, exercise, and sleep habits, plus stress levels. "Your entire lifestyle impacts your heart health," says Reva Gajer, the nurse practitioner who spent a good 30 minutes discussing my answers.

The importance of the questions was in their specificity. It wasn't just, Do you exercise? But also, How many minutes a week? Do you increase your heart rate? I thought I'd get an A+ because I do strength training and two cycling classes each week. But Stacey said, "Moderate daily exercise is important, too." She suggested

weaving brisk walking (going between errands as if I'm late) into my daily routine.

Of course diet has a HUGE impact on heart disease, and the questionnaire asked how much produce I eat a day (five servings is the minimum) and how much alcohol I drink. (One 5-ounce glass of wine a day is protective, and no, you can't stockpile for weekends.) Uncontrolled stress can harm your heart, so the mini quiz teased out my state of mind with questions like, In the last month, how often have you felt anxious? Do you sleep well?

Also worth noting: complications during pregnancy, which is basically a stress test for your heart. High blood pressure or gestational diabetes puts you at an increased risk of heart disease for five to 15 years after giving birth.

A few days postexam, Reva called about my blood work. "You're the most boring patient I've ever met," she said. My good cholesterol (HDL) is 112, and my bad (LDL) is 93—a relief because my mom and dad have high cholesterol. "This is the portrait of someone who eats right and exercises." Health nut mission accomplished. ■

LET'S TALK

Start the discussion at your next checkup with these questions:

- What are my heart disease risk factors?
- What tests do I need to evaluate my heart health?
- How can I protect my heart over my lifetime?

For actionable advice, check out *Heart Smart for Women* by cardiologists Stacey Rosen, M.D., and Jennifer Mieres, M.D., with Northwell Health.

