

# Be your own diva: Get heart healthy with Star Jones

BY LINDA CHILDERS



**S**tar Jones knows it can be hard for busy career women and mothers to find the time to exercise and eat right. "I'm that person who didn't put my health first," Star says. "I learned late in life that health is my greatest asset and now, at 50, I feel better than I have in years."

As a volunteer with the American Heart Association, Star emphasizes that it's never too late to adopt healthy habits and improve your health. Here, she shares her own tips for making 2013 your best year ever:

- **Be your own diva.** "Women are always there for their husbands, children and friends, but they also need to make time for themselves, to make their own health a priority," Star says. "I encourage women to be their own diva, to care enough about themselves to make the time to eat right and exercise, the same way they make time to have their hair

and nails done, or to chat with friends. We can't be there to care for our loved ones if we neglect our own health."

- **Choose the right foods.** Star drastically changed her diet after undergoing gastric bypass surgery but adopted even more of a heart-healthy lifestyle after having open-heart surgery. "I still allow myself to eat fast food once a month so I don't feel deprived," she says. For the rest of the month, Star lowers her sodium and enjoys meals consisting of protein sources such as chicken and fish, leafy vegetables and snacks including almonds and cheese.

- **Get heart smart.** "The American Heart Association's website, [heart.org](http://heart.org), has nutrition information, motivational stories, exercise tips and invaluable information about how to reduce your risk of developing heart disease," Star says. "I visit the site a lot to refresh

my knowledge of certain topics and to read some of the Go Red for Women stories written by other heart disease survivors.”

• **Move to lose.** “I use to lead a sedentary lifestyle before my gastric bypass surgery,” Star admits. “Now I try to get in 30 minutes of exercise each day.” Weight loss is an important shield against heart disease, and in their Guidelines for the Treatment of Overweight and Obesity, the National Institutes of Health report that a 5 to 10 percent weight loss can make a huge difference in reducing cardiac risk factors including high blood pressure, high cholesterol and elevated glucose levels. To keep it fun and interesting, Star tries to vary her exercise routine. She walks to her job at the *TODAY* show and also enjoys SoulCycle indoor cycling classes.

• **Shun stress.** “I don’t allow stress to impact my spirit, because I know it can have a negative impact on my health,” Star says. “I’m a happy person and I try to avoid being around toxic people.” A new study, released in November 2012 and published in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*, found that meditation is a good stress reliever, and it appears to have an effect on reducing heart attack, stroke and even early death from heart disease.

• **Reap the benefits of living well.** “I know I’ll never regain the weight I lost because I love the way I feel,” Star says. “At my heaviest weight, I felt tired, depressed and short of breath. Feeling good is a tremendous motivation to maintain my health. I truly believe that by losing weight I saved my own life.” 