



Alcohol and Tobacco: Double Trouble

Smoking and alcohol abuse are primary preventable risk factors for heart disease. Taking steps now to eliminate these habits can translate into more years in your life — and more life in your years.

Send your habit up in smoke. If you smoke, your risk of developing heart disease is 2-4 times that of a nonsmoker, and your risk of sudden cardiac death is double. Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,800 chemicals, many of which can raise blood pressure, damage blood vessels and make vessels more vulnerable to narrowing, which can eventually lead to heart attack.

Smart strategy: If you smoke, create a cessation plan once you commit to quit. First, talk to your health care provider about nicotine replacement therapy (patch, gum, nasal spray), prescription medication, smoking cessation programs or counseling. A combination of two or more of these measures can improve your odds of success. Plus, as soon as you quit, your risk of heart disease begins to drop dramatically.

Get down on alcohol abuse. Heavy alcohol use can raise blood pressure, cause heart failure and lead to stroke, as well as contribute to cancer and other diseases.

Smart strategy: Limit alcohol consumption to no more than one drink a day for women, two for men. Experts call this moderate alcohol consumption.

Note: The American Heart Association cautions against starting to use alcohol if you don't drink or increasing amounts if you do. Alcohol use can lead to many problems, including obesity, alcoholism, accidents and suicide.

Are You Self-Medicating?

Reliance on alcohol or tobacco could signal excess stress in your life. **Try this exercise:** List the reasons you smoke or drink, then challenge yourself to list healthier responses to each reason. Awareness is the first step to changing your behavior.

More Heart Helpers

- **Know your numbers.** If you don't know your blood pressure or cholesterol levels, get tested. **Recommended:** aim for average blood pressure readings below 120/80 (a level considered pre-hypertensive), and a total blood cholesterol level of 200 or less.
- **Identify your ideal weight.** One way is to figure your body mass index (BMI), which indicates your amount of body fat. A BMI of 25 or higher is associated with higher risk of heart disease. **BMI formula for adults:** Multiply your weight in pounds by 703; then divide the result by your height (in inches) squared.
- **Lose a little, gain a lot.** If you're overweight, losing even 5 to 7 percent of your weight can lower multiple risks for heart disease.
- **Visit the past.** Knowing your family medical history and any presence of heart disease will help your health care provider suggest a more targeted plan of action.
- **Keep diabetes under control.** Diabetes greatly increases your risk of heart disease. If you have diabetes, work with your health care provider to manage it.
- **Weigh pros and cons of hormone replacement therapy (HRT).** Women's risk of heart disease goes up after menopause. HRT, which can relieve menopausal symptoms, may further raise risk of heart attack. Consult your health care provider for advice.
- **Teach your children.** Children who learn to eat right and stay physically active are more likely to maintain a healthy lifestyle as adults.
- **Take good care of yourself.** Work with your health care provider to reverse risks — smoking, excess weight or stress. Together, determine your need and frequency for regular screenings and lifestyle changes.



HEALTHY, HEALTHY HEART

A BATTLE PLAN FOR PREVENTING HEART DISEASE

TIME FOR A LIFESTYLE CHANGE?

Today's busy lifestyles can be hard on the heart. The combination of stress, poor diet, sedentary "couch potato" pursuits, smoking and other unhealthy habits can put you at risk for premature death from heart disease.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of Americans. Those at higher risk include people over age 65, those with a family history of heart disease, and certain ethnic groups, including African Americans and Mexican Americans. Men are more likely to have heart attacks earlier in life than women.

You can't change your age, family history, race or gender. But you can still protect your heart by boosting your overall health.

Heart-Healthy Living in 3 Smart Moves

1. EAT WELL.

Balanced meals low in saturated fat can help prevent arterial disease — and fight weight gain that forces your heart to work harder.

2. STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE.

Exercise is one of the best ways to keep the heart muscle strong. It also helps you manage your weight and reduce other risk factors, such as high blood pressure and unhealthy blood cholesterol levels.

3. BALANCE YOUR LIFE.

Managing stress and taking care of your mental health are keys to a healthy life that can keep your heart beating long and strong.



STEP 1 Enjoy Meals on the Light Side

FORGET the fat. Limit your total fat intake to 35 percent of your daily calories (with no more than 10 percent from saturated fat). Check nutrition labels for the fat content of foods, and opt for low- or no-fat varieties whenever possible — for dairy products and salad dressings for example.

CUT the cholesterol. Limit cholesterol to 300 mg per day. **Reminder:** Cholesterol is only found in foods of animal origin, never in plants, legumes or grain foods, such as cereals, breads and pasta.

PICK plant foods. Load up on fruits and vegetables, whole grains and protein sources such as beans and lentils in your daily meals. Low-fat diets rich in plant foods have been found to lower harmful cholesterol levels better than low-fat diets alone.

FAVOR fish. Many kinds of fish, especially salmon, contain heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Limit high-cholesterol seafood varieties, such as shrimp and squid.

TRY tasty strategies. Top bagels with jam, jelly or apple butter instead of cream cheese ... potatoes with reduced-fat sour cream or salsa instead of butter ... sandwiches with mustard instead of mayonnaise ... vegetables with lemon juice or herbs instead of cream sauces.

MAKE meats healthier. Trim fat from meat and remove skin from poultry ... keep portions to about the size of a deck of cards (2-3 oz.) ... bake, broil or grill instead of fry.

STEP 2 Get Active, Stay Active

GO FOR 30. As little as 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity can reduce your risk of heart disease. Put off by the idea of "work" in "workout?" Then don't call it exercise — have fun instead. Play with the kids ... walk the dog ... go on a hike or bike ride ... take dance lessons. But if you're unaccustomed to exercise, first talk to your health care provider.



Medicine in Your Shopping Cart

The next time you go grocery shopping, reach for more of these heart helpers: cantaloupe, watermelon, apricots, mangoes, oranges, carrots, yellow and red peppers, broccoli, salad greens, legumes and whole grains. All are good sources of heart-protecting nutrients and fiber.

STEP ON IT.

Get up, get out, put one foot in front of the other and walk! Experts recommend aiming to log 10,000 steps a day, the equivalent of 5 miles. Sound like a lot? Buy a pedometer to log your steps, and see how quickly they add up. You'll feel encouraged to keep raising the bar.

Bonus: Daily exercise gives you extra energy.

STEP 3 Strive for Better Balance

STOP stress in its tracks.

Choose activities that help you feel relaxed, and enjoy them regularly to balance the busyness in your life. Spend quiet time in nature. Or try practicing a calming hobby, such as gardening, model building or painting ... reading ... listening to music ... writing in a journal ... meditating.

KEEP anger in check.

Anger and hostility are associated with heart disease. When you feel your temper rising, check it quickly: Take deep breaths and count to 10. Or step

away and walk it off.

GET plenty of rest. Most people require 7-8 hours of sleep a night. Can't sleep? Make sure your bedroom is cool and well-ventilated. Avoid caffeine and loud music, and stimulating television programs right before bedtime. And skip alcohol — it may make you drowsy but will ultimately disrupt your sleep.

