

Heart Disease Prevention

Heart disease decreases the quality of life of millions of Americans and is the leading cause of death for both men and women. Most heart disease is related to the way we live. Changing to a healthier lifestyle helps prevent heart problems. If you already have heart disease, in many cases a healthier lifestyle can prevent worsening of heart problems.

Heart disease develops over many years. As you get older, you are more likely to have heart problems resulting from years of unhealthy habits. It's very important to take care of your health and reduce your risk for heart disease as you get older.

A family history of heart disease increases your risk for heart disease. If members of your family have had heart disease, it is especially important for you to try to lower other risk factors. While you can't change your family history, there are risk factors for heart disease that you can control.

Take Control

Make sure you are checked for these 3 of the 6 risk factors that can be treated:

- ✓ high blood pressure
- ✓ high cholesterol
- ✓ high blood sugar level (diabetes)

Once you know if you have 1 or more of these risk factors, you can work with your healthcare providers to get healthier and decrease your risk for heart problems.

The other 3 risk factors that you can control also require commitment and ongoing effort to lower your risk:

- ✓ being overweight
- ✓ smoking
- ✓ not getting enough physical activity

Talk to your healthcare provider about medical treatments and support programs that can help you stop smoking or lose weight. If you are overweight, being more active and losing even just 5 to 10% of your weight can lower your blood pressure, your blood sugar, and your cholesterol.

Enjoy the Benefits of More Exercise and Not Smoking

Regular exercise improves your health and your sense of well-being by:

- ✓ improving blood flow
- ✓ helping keep blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and blood sugar at normal levels
- ✓ keeping muscles in tone
- ✓ improving your mood and emotional health
- ✓ improving sleep quality
- ✓ helping bones stay strong

Aerobic exercise is most important for keeping your heart and lungs working well.

Depending on your level of fitness, you may need to start very slowly. Maybe your healthcare provider will recommend no more than 5 minutes of walking or exercising to start. But then you may be able to add a minute every day or two until you've worked up to 20 or 30 minutes a day.

Try to work up to at least 10 minutes of moderate exercise at a time and spread your total workout time over the week. For example, you might do 30-minute workouts, 5 times a week. A good exercise goal is to build up at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate aerobic exercise, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous activity. You might combine moderate and vigorous activity for a fun workout.

- **Moderate exercise** means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat. At a moderate level of exercise you'll be able to talk, but not sing. Examples of moderate exercise are walking fast, doing water aerobics, or playing doubles tennis.
- **Vigorous activity** means you're breathing hard and fast, and your heart rate has gone up quite a bit. If you're working at this level, you won't be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath. Examples of activities that require vigorous effort are jogging, swimming laps, or playing singles tennis.

If you have not been exercising, check with your healthcare provider and ask for an exercise prescription.

Stopping smoking has benefits you will enjoy almost immediately, and the benefits will last a lifetime, including:

- ✓ Your senses of smell and taste will come back.
- ✓ It will be easier to breathe, especially with exertion and exercise.
- ✓ Your gums and teeth will be healthier.
- ✓ Your smoker's cough will go away.
- ✓ Your risk of heart attack, stroke, and certain cancers will be much lower.

Eat Healthy and Lower Stress

Learn a few basics about nutrition and choose healthy foods so your body can get the nutrients it needs. A heart-healthy diet includes:

- ✓ All the green and yellow vegetables you can eat—raw, steamed, or baked.
- ✓ Unsweetened fruits—fresh, frozen, or cooked.
- ✓ Whole grains—like whole wheat, oats, brown rice, and quinoa—for fiber and protein.
- ✓ Lean protein from plants, low-fat dairy products, fish, and other animals (limit beef and other animal fats).

Lowering stress can help you have normal blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol. Enjoy your personal relationships. Let yourself take time out for the things you enjoy. Hobbies can be helpful, as are social groups, whether for religious gatherings, exercise, playing cards, or whatever interests you. Physical exercise, meditation, massage, and relaxation exercises can also help lower stress.

Take Small Steps Toward a Healthy Lifestyle

If you decide you need to make changes in the way you live, you probably won't be able to turn your life around all at once. Try to have healthier habits that fit well with your lifestyle goals. If you do, you will greatly decrease your chances of heart disease and other health problems, such as stroke and diabetes.

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