

HEART Health



Pledge to protect your heart, and it will return your devotion. Heart Disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. A simple cholesterol blood test and blood pressure check can help you and your doctor determine your risk.

HEART HEALTH

Commit to making one healthy lifestyle change to help your heart stay strong—so you can live, and love, for years to come:

Eat healthier.

Practicing healthy, balanced eating habits can help you keep your heart and blood vessels in good shape. Here are some suggestions for eating healthier:

- Replace high-calorie processed foods with foods that can supply you with more of the important nutrients your body needs, like whole-grain breads and cereals, fresh fruits, and vegetables.
- Choose low-fat or nonfat dairy products, and use egg whites instead of whole eggs. Trim skin from chicken and fat from meats before cooking.

- Limit your intake of saturated fat (found in meats and dairy) and trans fat (found in hydrogenated oils). Instead, use healthier fats like those in olive, canola, soybean, and corn oils. Also include omega-3 fatty acids in your diet, which you can get from salmon, flaxseed oil, and nuts.
- Choose foods with no or low sodium, and add less salt when cooking or eating.

Watch your weight.

Losing extra pounds can help protect your heart, but try to lose them wisely. Fad diets, medications, and herbal supplements don't work well over the long term and may even harm your health. Your body converts extra calories to fat, which causes

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you to gain weight. To lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories than your body needs for energy. Try not to lose weight too quickly by starving yourself. Gradual adjustments to your eating habits can be much easier to stick to, and are often more successful in the long run.

Exercise regularly.

At least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week is a good goal for a healthy adult. Try taking a brisk walk in your neighborhood or riding a stationary bike in your living room. Any activity that gets you moving and builds muscle strength can help you reduce your risk of heart disease, prevent or manage high blood pressure, and improve your cholesterol levels.

Keep your blood pressure in check.

High blood pressure, or hypertension, can be a major factor in the development of heart disease. High blood pressure often has no obvious symptoms, and nearly a third of people affected don't realize they have it. To find out your blood pressure, have it checked by your doctor. A blood pressure of 119/79 mm Hg or lower is considered normal. Treatments for high blood pressure may include losing weight, exercising, drinking less alcohol, using less salt, quitting tobacco, eating a healthy low-fat diet, and, if necessary, taking medication.

Manage your cholesterol levels.

Your body uses cholesterol to maintain and repair cells and to produce certain hormones. Your liver produces cholesterol, and you get additional cholesterol from the foods you eat.

High levels of LDL, the "bad" cholesterol, can clog your arteries, reduce blood flow to your heart, and put you at risk for stroke and heart attack. HDL, the "good" cholesterol, can help your body get rid of some LDL. Eating a balanced diet and getting regular exercise can help you manage your cholesterol levels. In some cases taking medication is needed. A total cholesterol level of less than 200 mg/dL is desirable. Have your cholesterol levels checked, including your triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood), and discuss your results with your doctor.

Learn how to reduce stress.

Stress, especially over a long period of time, can contribute to high blood pressure and increase your risk for heart attack, stroke, and other medical conditions. Try relaxing activities—like painting, writing, yoga, and meditation—to help you keep your life more balanced and less stressful.

Quit tobacco.

Smoking more than doubles your risk of developing heart disease. Tobacco smoke can reduce the amount of oxygen in your blood, damage blood vessel walls, and lead to the formation of blood clots. Using tobacco can also reduce your HDL ("good" cholesterol) levels. Quitting tobacco is one of the most important steps you can take to prevent heart disease and improve your health.

Learn more.

Visit kp.org/heart to discover how even small improvements can make a big difference in your life.