



# How Can I Make My Lifestyle Healthier?

It's never too late to make better health choices. All you need is a goal, a plan and the desire to live better.

Here are some simple steps to take:

- Don't smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products.
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly. Keep your blood pressure below 120/80 mm Hg
- Eat a healthy diet consistent with recommendations from the American Heart Association.
- Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (or a combination) each week.
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight (body mass index less than 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>).
- Have your cholesterol checked. Talk to your doctor about your numbers and how they impact your overall risk.
- Keep your fasting blood glucose at less than 100 mg/dL.

## How do I stop smoking?

- Decide on a Quit Day and ask your family and friends to support you.
- Ask your healthcare provider for information, programs and medications that may help.
- Go where smoking isn't allowed, and avoid being around people who smoke.
- Keep busy doing things that make it hard to smoke.

## How do I manage my blood pressure?

- If your doctor has put you on medication, take it exactly as prescribed.
- If you are overweight, work to reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- Be more physically active.



- Reduce your salt (sodium) intake.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet.

## How do I change my eating habits?

- Eat a diet rich in vegetables and fruits.
- Choose whole-grain foods and low-fat dairy products.
- Eat fish, preferably those containing omega-3 fatty acids (for example, salmon, trout and herring), at least twice a week.
- Select skinless poultry and choose lean cuts of meat. But, limit your intake of red meats.
- Include legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Use healthy fats and oils, such as olive, canola, corn or safflower.
- Limit how much saturated fat, *trans* fat and added sugars you eat.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no sodium (salt). Aim to consume no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day.
- If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation.

## What about physical activity?

- Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical
- (continued)



activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (or a combination) each week.

- Include muscle-strengthening activity at least two days per week for additional health benefits.
- Look for ways to be more active. Take 10- to 15-minute walking breaks during the day or after meals.

### How can I reach and maintain a healthy weight?

- To lose weight, you must take in fewer calories than you use.
- Follow an overall heart-healthy diet.
- Get and stay physically active.

### How do I manage my cholesterol?

- Get your cholesterol checked at least once every five years. Start at age 20. Talk to your doctor about your numbers and how they impact your overall risk.
- Limit your saturated fat intake to less than 5 to 6 percent of total calories.
- Look for foods with “0” grams of trans fat.
- If your doctor has put you on medication, take it exactly as prescribed.



### What can I do to reduce my blood sugar?

- Reduce consumption of simple sugars that are found in soda, candy and sugary desserts.
- Get regular physical activity! Take medications or insulin if it is prescribed for you.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call **1-800-AHA-USA1** (1-800-242-8721), or visit **heart.org** to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up to get *Heart Insight*, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at **heartinsight.org**.
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at **heart.org/supportnetwork**.

## Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:

**What's the most important change I can make?**

**What if I go back to bad habits?**

## My Questions:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit **heart.org/answersbyheart** to learn more.