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/m2).
- 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

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- to15-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.

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