

The **Heart** of it All



How can I keep my family "heart healthy"?

Our families are made up of all ages, shapes, sizes, and fitness levels. But whether you are caring for your partner, a grandparent, teen, or toddler, there are simple steps you can take to ensure every member of your family stays heart healthy.

The key to fighting cardiovascular disease is to encourage a healthy diet and active lifestyle. You can play an important role in your family's heart health from childhood and beyond, by setting a good example. Here are some tips to guide you to keep your family's hearts healthy.

Eat Healthy

- Avoid sugary drinks and choose water or skim milk instead.
- Eat vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean meats.
- Avoid fried, fatty baked goods.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

3 Benefits:

- 1 **Lowers your risk of heart disease**
- 2 **Gives you more energy**
- 3 **Helps you feel good about yourself**

The Body Mass Index is a measure of your weight relative to your height. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute provides an easy-to-use online tool to help you estimate your body fat. Combining BMI with waist circumference measures your risk for heart disease and can calculate your risk for developing obesity-associated diseases. To check your BMI online, visit https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm

Get Active

- The easiest way to get your kids active is to have them walk or bike to school, if possible.
- Limit screen time to two hours or less per day. When you do spend time in front of the screen, use the time to do yoga, stretch or lift weights.

If your kids are sports-averse, encourage daily family walks after dinner, or run around and toss the ball to the dog in the backyard. The goal is to get at least 150 minutes (2.5) hours of physical activity per week.

Quit Smoking and Stay Away from Secondhand Smoke

- Smoking increases your risk of having and dying from heart disease, heart failure, or a heart attack.
- Quitting smoking greatly reduces the risk of recurrent heart attack and cardiovascular death.
- Quitting smoking is possible. Millions of people have successfully quit smoking and remain nonsmokers.
- If you smoke, set a quit date and let those close to you know about it. Ask your family and friends for support in your effort to quit smoking.
- Avoid secondhand smoke by not going to places where smoking is allowed. Ask friends and family members to not smoke in the house and car.

Control Your Cholesterol and Blood Pressure

- Undiagnosed or untreated high blood cholesterol can lead to serious complications such as heart attack and stroke.
- Your doctor will order routine lipid panel blood tests to screen for high blood cholesterol, depending on your age, risk factors or family history.

- If you have high blood pressure, you and your health care provider need to work together as a team to reduce it by maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active, eating healthy, reducing sodium, drinking only in moderation, and taking prescribed drugs as directed.

Know Your Numbers

Desirable Cholesterol Levels

- Total cholesterol - Less than 200 mg/dL
- LDL ("bad" cholesterol) - Less than 100 mg/dL
- HDL ("good" cholesterol) - 60 mg/dL or higher
- Triglycerides - Less than 150 mg/dL

Blood Pressure Levels

- 140/90 mmHg or higher is considered high

Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation

- In addition to raising blood pressure, too much alcohol can add unneeded calories to your diet.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, have only a moderate amount—one drink a day for women, two drinks a day for men.

Manage Stress

- Many studies report a connection between stress and heart health. For example, the most commonly reported "trigger" for a heart attack is an emotionally upsetting event, particularly one involving anger. After a heart attack, people with higher levels of stress and anxiety tend to have more trouble recovering. Also, some common ways of coping with stress, such as overeating, heavy drinking, and smoking, are clearly bad for your heart.

Make Good Sleep Habits

- Lack of sleep is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and stroke.
- Sleep regulates metabolism and better sleep is associated with healthier weight, which is good for your heart.
- Keep the same sleep schedule on weeknights and weekends. Limit the difference to no more than about an hour.
- Use the hour before bed for quiet time. Avoid strenuous exercise and bright artificial light, such as from a TV or computer screen.
- Avoid heavy and/or large meals within a couple hours of bedtime.
- Avoid nicotine, caffeine and alcohol which can interfere with sleep.
- Spend time outside every day (when possible) and be physically active.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, cool, and dark (a dim night light is fine, if needed).
- Take a hot bath or use relaxation techniques before bed.

ACTION ITEMS

You can keep your family heart healthy by encouraging a healthy diet and active lifestyle. Talk to your healthcare provider about what tests and screenings are important for your family to maintain their heart health.