

Heart Disease: Lifestyle Changes to Lower Risk



If you have heart disease, you can help lower your risk of a heart attack and stroke with healthy lifestyle changes. A healthy lifestyle can also improve the quality and length of your life.

You can lower your risk for heart attack and stroke by making lifestyle changes and taking medicine.

To be heart-healthy, eat healthy foods, be active, stay at a healthy weight, and don't smoke.

Making lifestyle changes

It's not easy to make changes. But taking the time to really think about what will motivate or inspire you will help you reach your goals. Also, the more support you have for making a lifestyle change, the easier it is to make that change.

Ask your doctor if a cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) program is right for you. In cardiac rehab, you will get support to help you build new, healthy habits.

Getting active

Before you start a new activity, talk to your doctor about how much exercise is safe.

Start slowly, and go at a pace you can manage. Try to do at least 2½ hours of moderate exercise a week. One way to do this is to be active 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week.

Walking is an easy, low-cost way to be active. Walking with a partner helps you keep up a routine. Try using a phone app or pedometer to count your steps and set walking goals.

Here are some other ideas for getting active:

- Work in the yard or garden.
- Swim or go for a bike ride.
- Join a health club or walking group.

No matter what you do, the key is making physical activity a regular, fun part of your life.

Heart-healthy eating

Healthy eating starts with learning new ways to eat, such as adding more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and cutting back on foods that have a lot of saturated fat, sodium, and sugar.

Heart-healthy foods include:

- Lean meat, poultry, fish, and beans.
- Fruits and vegetables.
- Whole grains and cereals.

You can work with a dietitian to make a healthy eating plan.

Healthy weight

Getting active and eating a healthy diet can help you lose extra weight.

You'll have more success getting to a healthy weight if you first change the way you think about certain things:

- Don't compare yourself to others. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

- Pay attention to how hungry or how full you feel. When you eat, pay attention to why you're eating and how much you're eating.
- Decide that you're going to improve your health and plan exactly what you'll do to reach that goal.

Quit smoking

Quitting smoking may be the best thing you can do for your heart and your body. It is hard to quit. But there are many things that can help you. Ask your doctor about:

- Medicine.
- Support groups and quitting smoking programs.
- Internet programs and smartphone or tablet apps.

Tips for getting support

- Partner with someone who is also making lifestyle changes.
- Get friends and family involved.
- Join a class or workout group.
- Give yourself positive reinforcement.

Taking medicine

You will also take medicine that lowers your risk for heart attack and stroke. This includes medicine to:

- Lower risk of blood clots.
- Lower blood pressure.
- Lower cholesterol.

Even though you are taking medicine, it is always important to make lifestyle changes that keep your heart and your body healthy.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.