

Healthy People

Healthy Heart Month

During the month of February, Americans see the human heart as the symbol of love.

February is American Heart Month, a time to show yourself the love. Stay "heart healthy" for yourself and your loved ones.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD)—including heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure—is the number 1 killer of women and men in the United States. It is a leading cause of disability, preventing Americans from working and enjoying family activities.

You can control a number of risk factors for CVD, including:

- Diet
- Physical activity
- Tobacco use
- Obesity
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Diabetes
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As you begin your journey to better heart health that can last a lifetime, keep these things in mind:

- Try not to become overwhelmed. Every step brings you closer to a healthier heart, and every healthy choice makes a difference!
- Partner up. The journey is more fun—and often more successful—when you have company. Ask friends and family to join you.
- Don't get discouraged. You may not be able to take all of the steps at one time. Get a good night's sleep—also important for a healthy heart—and do what you can tomorrow.
- Reward yourself. Find fun things to do to decrease your stress. Round up some colleagues for a lunchtime walk, join a singing group, or have a healthy dinner with your family or friends.

Plan for Prevention

Try out these strategies for better heart health. You'll be surprised how many of them can become lifelong habits!

Work with your health care team. Get a checkup at least once each year, even if you feel healthy. A doctor, nurse, or other health care professional can check for conditions that put you at risk for CVD, such as high blood pressure and diabetes—conditions that can go unnoticed for too long.

Monitor your blood pressure. High blood pressure often has no symptoms, so be sure to have it checked on a regular basis. You can check your blood pressure at home, at a pharmacy, or at a doctor's office.

Get your cholesterol checked. Your health care team should test your cholesterol levels at least once every 5 years. Talk with your health care professional about this simple blood test.

Eat a healthy diet. Choosing healthful meal and snack options can help you avoid CVD and its complications. Limiting sodium in your diet can lower your blood pressure. Be sure to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables—adults should have at least five servings each day. Eating foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol and high in fiber.

Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight or obese can increase your risk for CVD. To determine whether your weight is in a healthy range, health care professionals often calculate a number called body mass index (BMI). Doctors sometimes also use waist and hip measurements to measure a person's body fat.

Exercise regularly. Physical activity can help you maintain a healthy weight and lower cholesterol and blood pressure. The Surgeon General recommends that adults should engage in moderate-intensity activity for at least 150 minutes per week. Remember to incorporate exercise into your day in different ways: take the stairs instead of the elevator, or rake the yard instead of using the leaf blower. Exercising with friends and family can be a great way to stay healthy and have fun.

Don't smoke. Cigarette smoking greatly increases your risk for CVD. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, quit as soon as possible. Your health care team can suggest ways to help you quit.

Limit alcohol use. Avoid drinking too much alcohol, which can increase your blood pressure. Men should stick to no more than two drinks per day, and women to no more than one.

Manage your diabetes. If you have diabetes, monitor your blood sugar levels closely, and talk with your health care team about treatment options.

Take your medicine. If you're taking medication to treat high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, or another condition, follow the instructions carefully. Always ask questions if you don't understand something. If you have side effects, talk with your health care team about your options.



For more information visit www.cdc.gov/feature/heartmonth