



The Power of Heart Health

It's never too late or too early to make changes.

Heart disease, also known as coronary artery disease, is an ever growing problem in today's society. It continues to be the number one cause of death in most men and women from all over the world despite the fact that heart disease is highly preventable. A recent landmark study of 30,000 racially and ethnically diverse men and women from across the globe found that nine factors related to nutrition and lifestyle accounted for 95% of the risk of heart attack. These nine factors were: smoking, cholesterol level, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, diet, physical activity alcohol and psychological issues, such as emotional stress and depression. By controlling or changing these contributing factors, such as diet and lifestyle habits, you may reduce your risk of developing heart disease.

Make a powerful difference in your health and well-being by simply making better everyday choices: what you eat; how you respond to stress; whether or not you smoke; and how much you exercise. To begin your journey on the road to better health, ask and answer these four basic questions:

- How healthy am I?
- Could I be healthier?
- Am I at risk for heart disease because of my current diet and lifestyle habits?
- What simple choices can I make today to reduce my risk for heart disease?

Be Proactive

Get regular checkups and have your blood pressure checked routinely. Your blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, waist circumference and Body Mass Index (BMI) measurements or “your numbers” are key indicators of heart health.

- By knowing your numbers and having a plan of action, you can lessen your chance of developing heart disease, as well as other chronic diseases.
- Your health care provider can identify your numbers, discuss where they should be (i.e. your targets) and how to reach or maintain those targets.

Maintain/achieve a healthy weight. Excess weight can make you more likely to have high cholesterol and other fats in your blood and can increase your risk for developing high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Be aware of your weight and its impact on your health by knowing your BMI and waist circumference.

- Speak with your health care provider about strategies to lose weight.
- Decide if you can do a weight management program on your own or if you need a more structured program.
- Proper diet and regular physical activity can help you maintain or achieve a healthy weight.
- Cut back on portion sizes and reduce night time snacking.

Don't smoke. If you smoke, take action to quit. Smoking is a major risk for heart disease and stroke; stopping smoking lowers your risk. Smoking injures blood vessels and speeds up the hardening of the arteries process. There are many options available to help you quit—in the community, online and telephonically.

- For more information or to enroll in telephonic Smokeless[®] programs, members should call 1-800-345-2476.
- National Quitlines include: 1-800-QUITNOW (Quitline Consortium), 1-800-LUNGUSA (American Lung Association) and 1-877-44U-QUIT (National Cancer Institute Quitline).
- Talk to your health care provider to see if you are a candidate for anti-smoking medication (prescription/over-the-counter) that may help you quit.

Eat a heart-healthy diet. A heart-healthy diet can help prevent heart disease and control weight. Eat a diet rich in fish, fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains, and choose “good” monounsaturated fats like canola and olive oil. Also, cut back on foods that are high in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium (salt). Preparing foods in a healthy way is as important as buying the right foods.

Here are a few preparation tips to get started:

- Cut the visible fat off all meat before cooking.
- Steam, roast, boil, bake or broil foods instead of frying.
- Use small amounts of canola or olive oil in cooking rather than lard, butter or shortening.
- Use a nonstick cooking pan and use no-stick cooking spray.

Get regular exercise. Make physical activity part of your daily routine. Strive for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise on most days of the week. Beginners should start slowly and work up to a level that is right for them and/or recommended by their health care provider. (Consult with a health care provider before starting any exercise program.)

- Start with a walk around the block every other day and over a few weeks increase the walk to daily.
- Then over a few weeks, start to pick up the pace and walk at lunch and after work until you hit the minimum goal of 30 minutes.
- The more walking and physical activity you do throughout a day the better—strive to move as much as you can.

Manage your stress. According to the American Heart Association, more and more evidence suggests a relationship between the risk of cardiovascular disease and environmental and psychosocial factors including job strain, social isolation and personality traits. More research is needed on how stress contributes to heart disease risk and whether stress is an independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Acute and chronic stress may affect other risk factors and behaviors, such as high blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels, smoking, physical inactivity and overeating.

These simple steps will help you to manage and reduce the negative effects of stress in your life:

- Sit quietly for 15 to 20 minutes a day, breathing deeply and visualizing a peaceful place.
- Learn to live life with the things that you cannot change. Being angry for an extended period of time is not good for you or your body.
- Share your problems with others. Getting worries off your mind can help you feel better. Seek professional help, if necessary.
- Do a physical activity each day that you enjoy. Exercise is a great way to get rid of stress.

Access online programs.

Do you want to manage weight or stress, improve your eating habits, manage chronic conditions or back pain, quit smoking or make overall healthy lifestyle choices? Highmark offers online programs from HealthMedia® that can help you meet your wellness goals. It only takes a few minutes to get started:

1. Go to Highmark’s Web site at www.highmark.com and select your service region.
2. Complete the login process, entering your user name and password; if you do not have a username and password, select “Register Now” and follow the instructions.
3. Choose the “YOUR HEALTH” tab and then click on “IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH.”
4. Select the program in which you wish to enroll and follow the prompts.

These simple steps will help your chance of preventing heart disease. It’s your choice and it is never too late or too early to make changes. Start today!



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