



How Can I Live a Healthier Lifestyle?

It's never too late to start making better health choices. You can live a healthier lifestyle by following Life's Essential 8™, eight steps for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health.

Life's Essential 8 is made up of two areas: health behaviors and health factors.

Health behaviors

- Eat better.
- Be more active.
- Quit tobacco.
- Get healthy sleep.

Health factors

- Manage weight.
- Control cholesterol.
- Manage blood sugar.
- Manage blood pressure.

You don't need to tackle these all at once. You can take it one step at a time.



How can I eat better?

Try to make smart choices and swaps to build an overall healthy eating style. Learn how to read and understand food labels to help you make healthier choices.

- Enjoy vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, plant-based proteins, lean animal proteins, skinless poultry, fish and seafood.
- Limit sweetened drinks, alcohol, sodium, red and processed meats, added sugars, full-fat dairy products, highly processed foods, and tropical oils such as coconut oil and palm oil.

How can I be more active?

Adults should aim for 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week, or a combination of both. You should also include muscle-strengthening activity (like resistance or weight training) at least two days a week.

- If you haven't been active, start with 10 to 15 minutes a day and work up to more.
- Find forms of exercise you like and will stick with.

How can I quit tobacco?

You're more likely to quit tobacco for good if you prepare by creating a plan that fits your lifestyle. Here are some steps that may help you:

- Set a quit date.
- Choose a method: cold turkey or gradually.
- Decide if you need help from a health care professional, nicotine replacement or medication.
- Prepare for your quit day by planning how to deal with cravings and urges.
- Quit on your quit day.

How can I get healthy sleep?

Adults should aim for an average of 7-9 hours of sleep a day. Healthy sleep promotes healing, improves brain function and reduces the risk for chronic diseases.

You can make small changes to improve the quality of your sleep by:

- Being physically active during the day to help reduce stress and sleep better.

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How Can I Live a Healthier Lifestyle?

- Establishing a bedtime routine. Try to go to bed and wake up at about the same time each day.
- Keeping your phone and electronic devices out of the bedroom.

How can I manage my weight?

Understanding how many calories you take in and your activity level can help you identify changes you want to make. To lose weight, you need to burn more calories than you eat.

- Learn about portion sizes, read the nutrition facts label and keep track of what and how much you are eating.
- Sit less and move more to burn more calories. Use an activity tracker to help you gauge how much activity you are getting.

How can I control my cholesterol?

Healthy lifestyle changes, including diet, regular physical activity and weight loss, are a first step in improving your cholesterol.

If lifestyle changes alone aren't enough, your health care professional may prescribe statins or other medications to help control your cholesterol levels.

How can I manage my blood sugar?

You can start by having your health care professional measure your blood sugar levels. If you're diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, you may need to check your blood sugar level daily and monitor your carbohydrate intake.

You can help manage your blood sugar levels by following a healthy diet, being physically active and reaching and maintaining a healthy weight. You also may need medicines to help control your blood sugar or insulin levels.

How can I manage my blood pressure?

Have your blood pressure checked regularly. If your blood pressure is normal (below 120/80 mm Hg), have it checked at least every two years. If it's not, follow your health care professional's advice to control it.

You may need to make lifestyle changes such as not smoking, eating a healthier diet and limiting your sodium (less than 1,500 mg/day) and alcohol intake. You may also need to lose weight and be more physically active. If lifestyle changes alone don't work, medication may be needed.

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 for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news 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 your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

What's the most important change I should make first?

How often should I check my blood pressure?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/AnswersByHeart to learn more.