



Making Your Lifestyle Heart Healthy

The millions of Americans diagnosed with heart and cardiovascular diseases can benefit from making healthful choices in their day-to-day lives.

“While it’s certainly necessary to take medications to lower high cholesterol or blood pressure, it’s equally important to have a healthy lifestyle,” says Richard Stein, M.D., chief of the department of medicine in the Singer Division at Beth Israel Hospital in New York City, and a spokesman for the American Heart Association. “People who are informed and proactive when it comes to lowering their health risks are very likely to avoid heart disease and heart attacks.”

By following these recommendations, people at normal risk for heart disease can reduce their risk and make their lives more enjoyable.

Eat a healthful diet

Eating a healthy diet has been proven to reduce the risk for heart disease. To eat a heart-healthy diet:

- Eat two cups of fresh fruits and two and a half cups of vegetables every day.
- Limit saturated and trans fats by using olive oil or other vegetable oils instead of butter or margarine.
- Eat six ounces of grains, of which at least three ounces should be from whole-grain bread and cereal.
- Limit or eliminate fast foods, which are often loaded with salt, sugar and fats.
- If you drink alcohol, do so moderately – no more than two drinks a day if you’re male, one if you’re female.
- Limit your salt/sodium intake.

Exercise more

Regular exercise keeps your heart and the rest of your body in shape. To add more activity to your life:

- Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program if you’ve been sedentary and/or have a chronic disease.

- Start slowly and increase your activity gradually to a total of 30 – 60 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week.
- Engage in weight training and stretching exercises several times a week.

Stop smoking

Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease. To live smoke free:

- Decide to quit and set a quit date. Try again if you fail. Successful quitters have “quit” an average of nine times.
- Ask your doctor for information about cessation aids, such as a patch, inhaler and counseling/support programs.

Learn to relax

Chronic anger and stress can damage your heart. To better cope with life’s pressures:

- Develop ways to stay positive
- Take 15 – 20 minutes a day to sit quietly and breathe deeply.
- Take time for yourself each day. Read a book, listen to music or enjoy a hobby.

Monitor your health

Be proactive when it comes to your heart’s health. To do so, work with your health care provider to reduce your heart disease risk by following up with him or her for treatment for high blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

“Denial is the number one risk factor for having a heart attack,” says Dr. Stein. “Call 911 immediately if you have chest pain if you’re a man, or are short of breath, dizzy and have a burning sensation in the chest area if you’re a woman. If you can get to a hospital in the same hour these symptoms start, it’s possible to prevent a heart attack or limit the damage.”

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Your Caregiving Plan

The better prepared you are when you decide to become a caregiver, the better able you will be to provide quality care overall. Caregiving can be very stressful, but with the proper preparation and attention, caregiving can also help you feel that you're having a direct and immediate impact on the well-being of someone you care about.

To deliver good quality care and to be truly responsible for your caregiving responsibilities, you need a plan of action. The best plans include a clear and thoughtful approach to determining foreseeable problems from the start and the ability to adapt when situations go awry. Create a plan that looks at each problem you might encounter and determine what steps you can take to resolve each problem as it happens. If you have a support structure in place, be certain to include those team members that are available to support you as you navigate tough issues.

Below are some considerations you should make when creating your caregiving plan:

- Who will be involved with your caregiving plans? When are they available?
- What kind of specialized care do you need? When does it need to be available?
- Who will make decisions related to the care of the patient?
- What duties need to be carried out daily, weekly, monthly? Who is responsible for those duties?
- Who will handle the receipt, organization and paying of bills?
- Who will provide transportation? Who will be responsible for back-up transportation?
- Who will shop for groceries, provide meals and clean the dishes?
- Who will help with the daily living needs of the patient?
- Are there back-up caregivers? Who are they and in what order should they be contacted?
- Where will you store important financial, legal and medical documents?
- Does everyone who needs access to sensitive materials have access to them?

You should create your caregiver plan in four stages to ensure that you've taken as many needs into account before you begin the process. These four stages include:

1. **Closely examine the situation.** What are the medical needs of the patient? Will you be able to provide the care on your own or will you need other caregivers? Will you need additional support from trained medical professionals? Are there financial concerns that need to be considered? Are there daily living needs you can't provide for?
2. **Conduct research.** You will need to learn as much as you can about the caregiving process, the medical needs of your patient and the availability of certain care facilities. You will need to investigate health care options, financial breaks and special legal needs that are associated with being the primary care person for a patient.
3. **Review your information.** After you've collected the data that will support the development of your plan, you need to involve everyone who will be affected by the plan. Have them weigh in on the information, provide direction and tell you up front what they can and can't commit to.
4. **Make a decision.** It's time to develop your plan. Using the information you collected — the discussions you've had with family, other medical professionals and the details of the needs of your patient — you'll need to go through the list of issues you've identified and determine how each one will be solved.

