

My Plan For Heart Healthier Living

Everyday choices can make a big difference when it comes to your heart health and that of your blood vessels — also called your cardio (heart) vascular (blood vessels) health.

In fact, most heart disease-related deaths could be prevented by:



Maintaining a healthy weight



Eating well



Moving more



Avoiding tobacco

Adopting a healthy lifestyle can also help to manage existing cardiovascular disease and related complications.

But it can often be difficult to know where to begin. The American College of Cardiology developed this tool to help you. Use it to start a conversation with your clinician and prioritize your plan for healthier living.

You'll find information about specific health behaviors, space to write down your personal goals for each one, as well as links to more resources. There is also a worksheet to help you take note of what helps and what gets in the way of your efforts.

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Before Getting Started

The goals you set for yourself should be realistic given what else you have going on in your day-to-day life. Tell your clinician about any concerns or barriers to taking action — whether to lose weight, exercise more, eat better or stop smoking.

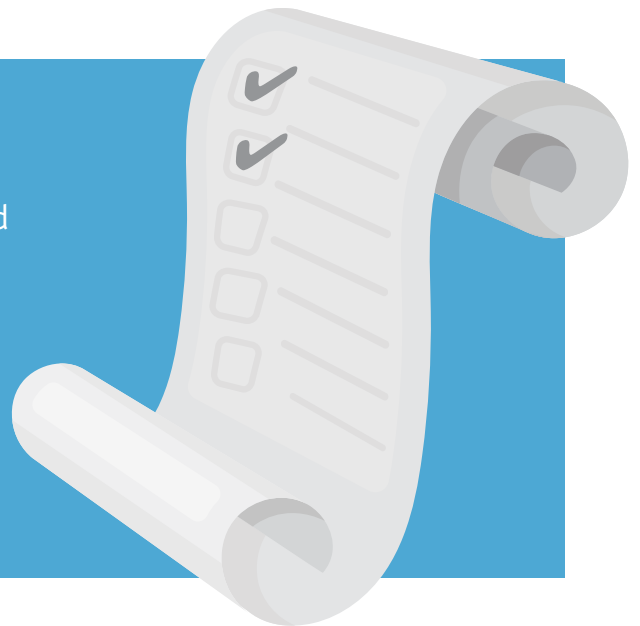
Examples of concerns or barriers:

- Not knowing how to start
- Cost
- Time required or other demands
- Poor access to safe places to exercise and/or affordable, healthy food options
- Cultural or social expectations or pressures
- Depression or anxiety
- Worries about pushing your heart too hard if you have heart disease or making other conditions worse

A WORD ON GOAL SETTING

Your care team can help you find programs, tools and resources to support your efforts. You might also benefit from seeing other experts; for example, a dietitian/nutritionist, exercise therapist, mental health counselor or social worker.

Anytime you have questions or need support along the way, always ask your care team.



Reach and Maintain a Healthy Weight



What We Know

- Excess fat, especially around your midsection, can fuel heart and blood vessel disease.
- Being overweight or obese also makes you more likely to develop a number of medical problems, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high blood sugar (diabetes) to name a few.
- If you're overweight, losing just 5% to 10% of your total body weight can improve your health.

What You Can Do

- A few tips to get started:
 - » Pay attention to what you eat. Keeping a food diary can help you see patterns.
 - » Pick one or two foods that are high in unhealthy fat or added sugars to avoid. This can be a first step to limit the calories you eat.
 - » Opt for water instead of sweetened beverages.
 - » Exercise more so you are burning calories and building strength, too.
 - » Identify stressors that trigger poor food choices, as well as one or two people who you can count on to support you in your efforts.
- Find out more at [CardioSmart.org/Obesity](https://www.CardioSmart.org/Obesity) and [CardioSmart.org/LoseWeight](https://www.CardioSmart.org/LoseWeight).

My Plan For Heart Healthier Living

MY PERSONAL GOAL FOR LOSING WEIGHT IS TO:

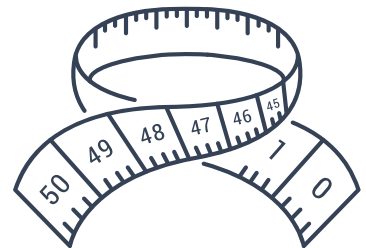
Keep my current body weight: _____ pounds.

Lose _____ pounds.

This works out to be _____ pounds in _____ weeks / months (circle).

My ideal or target body weight is: _____

OTHER NOTES:



Nutrition and Eating Heart Healthy

What We Know

- Smart choices and healthy eating can help lower your risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.
- Several eating plans — really more of a way of eating than so-called diets — are known to be helpful to the heart.
 - » The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet
 - » Mediterranean diet
 - » Vegetarian diet
- Healthy eating is not just what we eat, but also how we prepare our foods.

What You Can Do

- There's no single approach for everyone.
- In general, try to eat:
 - » Fresh fruits and vegetables
 - » Whole-grain foods
 - » Lean proteins and certain fish like salmon, tuna, mackerel and sardines
 - » Low-fat milk and dairy products
 - » Healthy fats (nuts, seeds, avocado and vegetable oils)

- In general, it's a good idea to:
 - » Make healthy choices when traveling or eating on the go
 - » Bake or grill foods instead of frying
 - » Cut down on salt; use spices, lemon or other means to flavor a dish
 - » Limit added sugar (sweetened drinks, pastries, some dairy products)
 - » Avoid trans fats
 - » Choose healthy snack options
- Ask if a referral to a dietitian or nutritionist could help.
- Find out more at [CardioSmart.org/Nutrition](https://www.heart.org/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition), [CardioSmart.org/EatBetter](https://www.heart.org/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/eat-better) and the NHLBI website.



My Plan For Heart Healthier Living

MY PERSONAL GOALS FOR EATING RIGHT:

As a first step, over the next month I will try to cut out or eat less:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I will aim to eat more (for example, # servings of fruits and vegetables per day or fish at least once a week):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

OTHER NOTES:



Commit to Regular Exercise



What We Know

- Not exercising — even simply sitting for too long — is harmful.
- Regular exercise may be your best defense against heart disease.
- Exercise is also a great stress-buster and can boost your mood and self-esteem.

What You Can Do

- Take an inventory of your current patterns of physical activity.
- Move more. Look for ways to be more active through exercise and also by opting for the stairs instead of the elevator, parking farther away from buildings or biking or walking to work, if possible.
- Experts recommend getting at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week, though it's always best to check with your doctor.
 - » Moderate exercise is any type of activity that:
 - Gets your heart pumping and
 - Makes it difficult to have a conversation
 - » Exercising in 10-minute bursts during the day counts — it adds up over time.
- Start by finding an activity that you enjoy and can do regularly to stay active.

Low	Moderate	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cleaning the house • cooking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brisk walking • biking • dancing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • jogging/running • fast biking • singles tennis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other _____

- Find out more at CardioSmart.org/Exercise.

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MY PERSONAL EXERCISE GOAL IS TO:

Get _____ minutes of moderate physical activity per week.

That's about _____ minutes each day.

I plan to do this by (list three activities you enjoy here):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

OTHER NOTES:



Avoid Tobacco Use and Get Help To Quit

What We Know

- Tobacco harms nearly every organ in the body, including the heart.
 - » Smoking is the second leading cause of cardiovascular disease behind high blood pressure.
 - » Nearly 1 in 3 deaths from heart disease are due to smoking or secondhand smoke.
 - » Even low levels of smoking make a heart attack more likely. E-cigarettes can also increase such events.
- Quitting isn't easy. Most people who have quit will tell you it often takes multiple attempts before being successful.
- It's never too late to quit — quitting tobacco at any age has lots of health benefits.
- There are many resources to help, including medications, nicotine replacement patches, counseling and support programs.



What You Can Do

- Be honest with your clinicians if you smoke — even if you've just casually puffed a cigarette or live with a person who smokes. They aren't there to judge, but to help you live healthy.
- If you smoke, set a date to quit. Mark it proudly on your calendar.
- Ask for resources to help.
- Call 1-800-784-8669 (1-800-QUIT-NOW).
- Visit [CardioSmart.org](https://www.heart.org/stop-smoking) to identify triggers and read about 8 steps to help you quit [CardioSmart.org/StopSmoking](https://www.heart.org/stop-smoking).

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MY PERSONAL GOAL TO QUIT IS TO:

I plan to quit on _____ (date)

I will enlist trusted family members or friends to help me stick with it.

I will tell (list three people who can help me commit to quit):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

I know my smoking triggers include:

I will access the resources above

OTHER NOTES:



Reduce Stress and Get Enough Sleep



What We Know

- Too much stress increases the likelihood of poor health habits like smoking and unhealthy eating. It can also hurt the heart and blood vessels.
- Research also shows that people who don't sleep enough are more likely to have heart troubles, and lack of sleep prompts the body to release stress hormones.
- Sleep apnea is a common condition that prevents restful sleep. It increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart failure, and other heart problems.

What You Can Do

- Take up activities that support your mind and body (for example, yoga, meditation, deep breathing, music).
- Aim for seven or more uninterrupted hours of shut-eye a night.
- If you suspect you might have sleep apnea, talk with your clinician. There is testing that can be done to evaluate this.
- Ask for a referral to a mental health expert or counselor if you think you need it. Many companies also offer employee assistance programs that are confidential and free.
- Find out more at [CardioSmart.org/SleepApnea](https://www.CardioSmart.org/SleepApnea).

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MY PERSONAL GOAL TO RELIEVE STRESS AND GET BETTER SLEEP IS TO:

If I feel overwhelmed or stressed, my go-to outlets to relieve anxiety are:

I will try to sleep _____ hours most nights.

I will adopt at least two healthy sleep habits.

- Leaving technology behind
- Keeping my bedroom dark and at an ideal temperature
- Going to bed at the same time nightly
- Not exercising or having caffeine within 2 hours of sleep
- Other: _____

OTHER NOTES:



Be Your Own Advocate

Speak up if there are hurdles to meeting your goals to live heart healthier.

Ask about your risk of heart disease and stroke.

- Talk about barriers to making lifestyle changes (for example, cost, access to foods or exercise venues, being unsure of your clinician's recommendations or related benefits). Use the worksheet, *Heart-Healthy Habits: What Helps and What Gets in the Way*, to make note of what helps and hurts your efforts.
- There are calculators of sorts that can help you and your clinician estimate how likely you are to have a heart attack or stroke in the next 10 years and also over a lifetime.
- Keep track of your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels and work with your clinician to keep them under control.
- Remember that your risk changes over time, so it should be a topic of ongoing discussion.



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MY PERSONAL GOAL TO BE MORE ENGAGED IN MY CARE IS TO:

MY PERSONAL GOAL TO BETTER UNDERSTAND MY OWN RISK (OR CHANCE) OF DEVELOPING HEART DISEASE AND STROKE:




MY NEXT FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT(S) AND/OR LAB WORK IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Heart-Healthy Habits: What Helps and What Gets in Way

Taking time to think about what might help and what might get in the way of you making lifestyle changes is important. Doing so can help you anticipate challenges and be more successful in your efforts. It can also give your clinicians important information to help support you.

	Things that will help me	Things that may make it difficult for me to reach my goals
<p>Reaching or maintaining a healthy weight</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ <p>Here's how I might be able to address these/feel more in control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____
<p>Nutrition and heart-healthy eating</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____ <p>Here's how I might be able to address these/feel more in control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _____ • _____ • _____

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<p>Regular exercise</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____ <p>Here's how I might be able to address these/feel more in control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____
<p>Avoid tobacco use and get help to quit</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____ <p>Here's how I might be able to address these/feel more in control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____
<p>Reduce stress and get enough sleep</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____• _____• _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____• _____ <p>Here's how I might be able to address these/feel more in control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• _____• _____