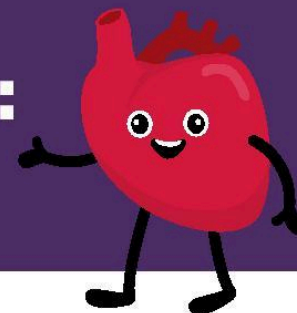


Take Action for Your Heart: Get Started!



Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, but it can often be prevented. Adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle can help you reduce the risk of heart disease and its risk factors. Take action to protect your heart by following these tips.

Get Enough Quality Sleep

Lack of sleep or getting poor-quality sleep increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions.

- Try to aim for 7-9 hours of sleep a night.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Exercise regularly, but not within 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine.



Eat Better

A flexible and balanced eating plan can help lower your high blood pressure and improve your cholesterol.

- Follow the [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension \(DASH\) eating plan](#), which can help you create a heart-healthy eating style for life.
- Read nutrition labels to pick the food lowest in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars.
- Try a mix of lean cuts of meat, eat fish once or twice a week, and eat two or more meatless meals each week.
- Consider whole fruits, dried fruits, unsalted rice cakes, fat-free and low-fat yogurt, or raw vegetables as a snack.

Stop Smoking

Any amount of smoking, even light or occasional smoking, damages your heart and blood vessels.

- Select a quit date and write yourself a contract that outlines your [plan for quitting](#).
- Talk with your healthcare provider about programs and products that can help you quit.
- Join a support group. Many hospitals, workplaces, and community groups offer classes to help people quit smoking.
- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW and visit smokefree.gov to get additional support.



Maintain a Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall health and can help you prevent and control many diseases and conditions.

- Choose healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables, yogurt, or nuts, instead of sugary or high-calorie snacks.
- Stay hydrated with water as your primary beverage.
- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise (such as brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity (like running) exercise per week.
- Consider keeping a log of what you eat throughout the day.

Be More Active

Getting enough physical activity helps to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.

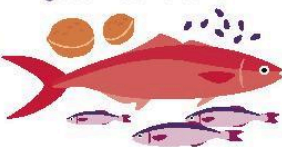
- Adults should spend at least 150 minutes (2 ½ hours) each week doing physical activity.
- Sit less! Take the stairs. Park farther away. March in place or take a walk around the block.
- Try muscle-strengthening activities like lifting weights, working with resistance bands, doing sit-ups and push-ups, or some forms of yoga—whatever works for you.
- If you don't have a lot of time in your day, try being active for 10 minutes at a time. Anything that gets your heart beating faster counts!



Control Cholesterol

Unhealthy levels of **cholesterol** can lead to high cholesterol, which increases the risk of developing heart disease.

- Try the **Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) Program** which combines diet, physical activity, and weight management to help lower high blood cholesterol and improve heart health.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that is low in saturated fats, as these can raise LDL cholesterol levels.
- Limit alcohol consumption. Drinking too much alcohol—more than two drinks a day for men or one drink a day for women—can raise your total cholesterol level.



Manage Stress

Learning how to manage stress with healthy coping strategies helps improve your emotional and physical health.

- Use relaxation techniques that combine breathing and focused attention on pleasing thoughts and images to calm the mind and body.
- Consider meditation, as it can help to **lower stress**.
- Take a yoga class to help lower stress and improve mindfulness. It may also offer you a supportive community.

Practice Self-Care & Find Social Support

Daily acts of **self-care** can benefit your heart because self-care is heart care. Studies show that having positive social support, close relationships, and feeling connected to others makes it easier to stick to heart-healthy habits.

- Try to do at least one positive action for your heart health each day.
- Make the doctor's appointment you've been putting off.
- Ask family and friends to text you reminders or encouragement to help you meet your health goals.
- Join an exercise class or a weight management group to connect with other like-minded people and stay motivated.

For more information about how you can take action to keep your heart healthy, visit [hearttruth.gov](https://www.hearttruth.gov)

Manage Blood Sugar

Maintaining stable blood sugar levels is crucial for heart health, especially for people with diabetes or those at risk of developing diabetes.

- Eat a diet rich in whole foods, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- Monitor your carbohydrate intake and choose complex carbohydrates, like whole grains and legumes, to help control blood sugar levels.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about how often you should check your blood sugar levels, especially if you have diabetes.

Control Blood Pressure

Keep your blood pressure in a healthy range and keep track of your numbers. Blood pressure that's consistently higher than 130/80 mm Hg can cause serious health problems.

- Have your blood pressure checked each time you visit the doctor.
- Use a blood pressure monitor to measure your blood pressure at home and **learn how to measure it correctly**.
- Use a **blood pressure tracker** to keep a record of your numbers each reading.
- If you're pregnant or planning to be, it's especially important to keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.



National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



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Parish Nurse Notes – February 4, 2024



February is American Heart Month

Did you know that people who have close relationships at home, work, or in their community tend to be healthier and live longer? One reason, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), is that we're more successful at meeting our health goals when we work on them

with others. NHLBI launched the #OurHearts movement to inspire us to protect and strengthen our hearts with the support of others.

Here are some facts, how-to tips, and resources to inspire you to join with others, even if you can't be physically together, to improve your heart health.

[Heart disease](#) is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. Most middle-aged and young adults have one or more risk factors for heart disease, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or being a smoker or overweight. Having multiple risk factors increases your risk for heart disease.

Why Connecting is Good for Your Heart

Feeling connected with others and having positive, close relationships benefits our overall health, including our blood pressure and weight. Having people in our lives who motivate and care for us helps, as do feelings of closeness and companionship.

Follow these [heart-healthy lifestyle tips](#) to protect your heart. It will be easier and more successful if you work on them with others, including by texting or phone calls if needed.

- Be more physically active.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a nutritious diet.
- Quit smoking.
- Reduce stress.
- Get 7-9 hours of quality sleep.
- Track your heart health stats.

You don't have to make big changes all at once. Small steps will get you where you want to go.

Move more!

Invite family, friends, colleagues, or members of your community to join you in your efforts to be more [physically active](#):

- Ask a colleague to walk "with you" on a regular basis, put the date on both your calendars, and text or call to make sure you both get out for a walk.
- Get a friend or family member to sign up for the same online exercise class, such as a dance class. Make it a regular date!
- Grab your kids, put on music, and do jumping jacks, skip rope, or dance in your living room or yard.

How much is enough? Aim for at least 2½ hours of physical activity each week—that's just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. In addition, do muscle strengthening exercises 2 days a week. Can't carve out a lot of time in your day? Don't chuck your goal, chunk it! Try doing 10 minutes of physical activity at least three times a day. NHLBI's [Move More fact sheet](#) has ideas to get and keep you moving.

Aim for a healthy weight!

Find someone in your friend group, at work, or in your family who also wants to reach or maintain a healthy weight. (If you're overweight, even a small weight loss of 5–10 percent helps your health.) Check in with them regularly to stay motivated. Agree to do healthy activities, like walking or cooking a healthy meal, at the same time, even if you can't be together. Share low-calorie, low-sodium recipes. Check out [NHLBI's Aim for a Healthy Weight](#) web page.

Eat heart-healthy!

We tend to eat like our friends and family, so ask others close to you to join in your effort to eat healthier. Follow NHLBI's [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension \(DASH\)](#) eating plan. Research shows that, compared to a typical American diet, it lowers high blood pressure and improves cholesterol levels. Find delicious recipes at [NHLBI's Heart-Healthy Eating](#) web page.

Quit smoking!

To help you quit, ask others for support or join an online support group. Research shows that people are much more likely to quit if their spouse, friend, or sibling does. Social support online can help you quit. All states have quit lines with trained counselors—call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). You'll find many free resources to help you quit, such as apps, a motivational text service, and a chat line at [BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov](#) and [Smokefree.gov](#).

If you need extra motivation to quit, consider those around you: Breathing other people's smoke, called secondhand smoke, is dangerous. Many adult *nonsmokers* die of stroke, heart disease, and lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke.

Manage stress!

Managing stress helps your heart health. Set goals with a friend or family member to do a relaxing activity every day, like walking, yoga, or meditation, or participate in an online stress-management program together. Physical activity also helps reduce stress. Talk to a qualified mental health provider or someone else you trust.

Improve sleep!

Sleeping 7–9 hours a night helps to improve heart health. De-stressing will help you sleep, as does getting a 30-minute daily dose of sunlight. Take a walk instead of a late afternoon nap! Family members and friends: remind each other to turn off the screen and stick to a regular bedtime. Instead of looking at your phone or the TV before bed, relax by listening to music, reading, or taking a bath.

Track Your Heart Health Stats, Together

Keeping a log of your blood pressure, weight goals, physical activity, and if you have diabetes, your blood sugar, will help you stay on a heart-healthy track. Ask your friends or family to join you in the effort. Check out NHLBI's [My Heart Health Tracker](#).

Visit [#OurHearts](#) for inspiration on what others around the country are doing together for their heart health. Then join the #OurHearts movement and let NHLBI know what you're doing to have a healthy heart. Tag #OurHearts to share how you and your family and friends are being heart healthy. For more information about heart health, visit www.hearttruth.gov

To contact Diane or Glenn, parish nurses, their email address is: parishnurse@fpcwinc.org or you can leave a message for them at 540-662-3824.