



Parish Nurse Notes – February 2, 2025

Celebrate American Heart Month



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Heart disease is the leading cause of death for 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 of heart disease. The good news is that there's a lot we can do to prevent it.

Connecting with Others is Good for Your Heart

Research shows that people with 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.

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

Lifestyle Tips

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. Follow these lifestyle tips to protect your heart.

- Be more physically active.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a nutritious diet.
- Quit smoking.
- Manage stress.

- Get 7-9 hours of quality sleep.
- Track your blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar numbers.

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” regularly, 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? 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 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 Are You at Healthy Weight? fact sheet.

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 webpage.

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 Numbers, Together

Keeping a lot 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 www.hearttruth.gov for more information about heart health.

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.

Tips on What to Eat vs. Limit




DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) is a flexible and balanced eating plan that helps create a heart-healthy eating style for life. It does not require any special foods and provides daily and weekly nutritional goals. The DASH eating plan supports overall heart health and helps lower high blood pressure and LDL “bad” cholesterol.



Eat This



Limit This

	Vegetables		Fatty meats
	Fruits		Full-fat dairy
	Whole grains		Sugar sweetened beverages
	Fat-free or low-fat dairy		Sweets
	Fish		Sodium intake
	Poultry		
	Beans		
	Nuts & seeds		
	Vegetable oils		

This plan recommends:

- Eating vegetables, fruits, and whole grains
- Eating foods rich in potassium, calcium, magnesium, fiber, and protein
- Choosing low-or reduced-sodium, or no-salt-added versions of foods
- Including fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans, nuts, and vegetable oils
- Limiting foods that are high in saturated fat, such as fatty meats, full-fat dairy products, and tropical oils such as coconut, palm kernel, and palm oils
- Limiting sugar-sweetened beverages and sweets

Find recipes, tools, and resources at
nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH

Consejos sobre qué comer y qué limitar

DASH (Enfoques dietéticos para detener la hipertensión) es un plan de alimentación flexible y equilibrado que ayuda a crear un estilo de alimentación cardiosaludable para toda la vida. No requiere ningún alimento especial y proporciona objetivos nutricionales diarios y semanales. El plan de alimentación DASH favorece la salud general del corazón y ayuda a reducir la hipertensión y el colesterol LDL “malo”.



Coma esto



Limite esto

	Vegetales		Carnes grasas
	Frutas		
	Granos integrales		Lácteos enteros
	Lácteos sin grasa o bajos en grasa		
	Pescado		Bebidas azucaradas
	Aves		
	Frijoles		Dulces
	Frutos secos y semillas		
	Aceites vegetales		Ingesta de sodio

Este plan recomienda:

- Comer vegetales, frutas y granos integrales
- Consumir alimentos ricos en potasio, calcio, magnesio, fibra y proteínas
- Elegir alimentos bajos en sodio, reducidos en sodio o sin sal agregada
- Incluir productos lácteos sin grasa o bajos en grasa, pescado, aves, frijoles, frutos secos y aceites vegetales
- Limitar el consumo de alimentos ricos en grasas saturadas, como las carnes grasas, los productos lácteos enteros y los aceites tropicales, como aceite de coco, aceite de nuez de palma y aceite de palma
- Limitar las bebidas azucaradas y los dulces

Busque recetas, herramientas y recursos en [nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH) (en inglés)

Stress Less for a Healthier Heart



Stress happens. You can't always prevent or avoid it. But you can change how you respond to it. Try these tips. You may feel better—and have a healthier heart, too!

Know How Stress Affects Your Body

Whether it's from everyday deadlines, the work-life balancing act, or financial struggles, stress shows up often. Your body reacts to it. Your heart rate increases, your blood vessels narrow—and especially over the long term that's not healthy! Research shows that stress can make us more likely to get heart disease and have a heart attack.

The origins of heart disease begin at a young age, so the earlier in life you learn how to de-stress, the happier you and your heart will be.

Ongoing stress acts on more than just your heart. It affects everything from your nervous system and hormones to your lungs and gut. You may not see the connection, and healthcare providers may not ask about your stress. So try to listen to your body while thinking about what's going on in your life.

Turn On Your Relaxation Response

Did you know your body also has a relaxation response? Your breathing slows and **blood pressure** and heart rate decrease. The good news is you can trigger that response.

Ways to do so often combine breathing deeply and focusing your attention on pleasing thoughts and images.

Here are a few relaxation response techniques to try. You can do these on your own or find a teacher or class to start. They may take some practice!

Progressive muscle relaxation

This approach calls for tightening individual muscles in your body and then releasing the tension. Start by tensing and relaxing your toes, then your calves, and on up to your face. Do one muscle group at a time.



Meditation

This is one of the most-studied approaches for handling stress. There are a variety of ways to do it, including through **mindfulness meditation**. Most meditation styles involve:

- Being in a quiet location with as few distractions as possible
- Being physically comfortable either sitting, lying, or walking
- Focusing your attention on a specific word or set of words, an object, or your breathing
- Having an open attitude and letting distractions, including thoughts, come and go without judgment



Guided imagery

This involves a series of steps that include relaxing and visualizing the details of a calm, peaceful setting, such as a garden. Learn more about stress and try a **guided imagery session**.



Deep breathing

This is something you can do anytime, anywhere. Take in a slow, deep breath, let your stomach or chest expand, then exhale slowly. Repeat a few times.



Find Your Way to Healthy Relaxing

There's no one way to control stress. You may want to try a stress management program, do yoga, talk to a professional counselor, take an art class, or join friends for a brisk walk. Being in nature is very soothing for some people.

If you're short on time, make a list of three-minute activities you love. Add one to each day of your calendar. Consider:

- Listening to a favorite tune during lunch
- Stretching after a warm shower
- Catching a few minutes of the sunrise or sunset



Finding healthy relaxation exercises is just one way to protect your heart. Combine de-stressing with other **heart-healthy habits**: eat nutritious foods, move your body more and exercise, get enough sleep, and develop a strong social support system.

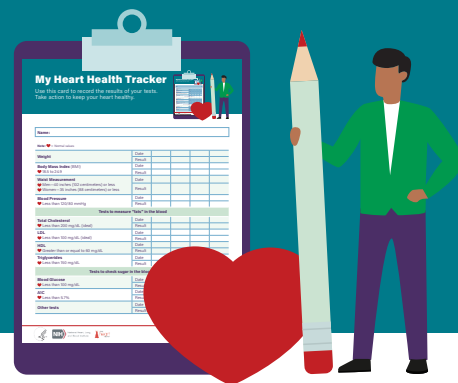
Know When It's More Than Just Stress

If you're feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope, are using drugs or alcohol more frequently, or are having suicidal thoughts, **seek professional help right away**. Resources are available from the **National Institute of Mental Health**.



My Heart Health Tracker

Keep track of important numbers related to your heart health.



Name: _____

Note: ♥ = Normal values

Weight	Date				
	Result				
Body Mass Index (BMI) ♥ 18.5 to 24.9	Date				
	Result				
Waist Measurement ♥ Men—40 inches (102 centimeters) or less ♥ Women—35 inches (88 centimeters) or less	Date				
	Result				
Blood Pressure ♥ Less than 120/80 mm Hg	Date				
	Result				

Tests to measure cholesterol

Triglycerides ♥ Less than 150 mg/dL	Date				
	Result				
Non-HDL cholesterol ♥ Less than 130 mg/dL	Date				
	Result				
HDL cholesterol ♥ Above 40 mg/dL in men ♥ Above 50 mg/dL in women	Date				
	Result				

Tests to check sugar in the blood for diabetes

Blood Glucose ♥ Less than 100 mg/dL	Date				
	Result				
A1C ♥ Less than 5.7%	Date				
	Result				
Other tests	Date				
	Result				

