



American
Heart
Association.

My Life Check™



Eight Essential Steps to
a Healthier Heart



My Life Check™ is a health and well-being assessment that is based on the science of Life's Essential 8™

Life's Essential 8™ are eight steps everyone should take to achieve ideal cardiovascular health.

Take the assessment at heart.org/MyLifeCheck.

My Life Check is offered free to employers through the American Heart Association's Well-being Works Better™ platform, which helps business leaders promote health and well-being for all.

The Well-being Works Better Resource Center has the tools you need to lead at heart.org/Workforce.

This booklet will help you:

Live Healthy

Introducing *Life's Essential 8™*

It's never too late to make better health choices. You can achieve ideal cardiovascular health by adhering to the eight components of *Life's Essential 8*:

1. Eat a healthy diet consistent with American Heart Association recommendations.
2. Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (or a combination of both) each week.
3. Don't smoke, vape or use other tobacco products and avoid second-hand smoke.
4. Aim for an average of 7 to 9 hours of sleep a day.
5. Reach and maintain a healthy body weight (body mass index less than 25 kg/m²).
6. Get your cholesterol checked and talk to your health care professional about your numbers and how they impact your overall risk.
7. Keep fasting blood sugar less than 100 mg/dL or an A1C of less than 5.7%.
8. Keep blood pressure below 120/80 mm Hg.

Make a New Life Resolution

1 Eat Better



A heart-healthy eating plan takes into account proper energy balance. This means balancing what you eat with the energy that you burn. If you can meet four to five of the following goals and keep your calorie levels in check, you're building an overall healthy eating plan. (Based on a 2,000-calorie-per-day diet.)

- Eat 2½ cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruits per day. Eat a variety of colors and types.
- Eat 5½ ounces per day of protein foods such as skinless poultry, seafood, lean meats and eggs.



- Eat 6 oz. of grains per day (at least half of the servings from whole grains).
- Have 3 cups of fat-free or low-fat dairy products per day, if you include dairy in your diet. Or choose milk substitutes such as soy, almond and rice milk that have calcium and Vitamins A and D added.
- Include limited amounts (5 oz. per week) of (unsalted) nuts, legumes and seeds.

Also keep sodium to no more than 2,300 milligrams (mgs) per day and an ideal limit of no more than 1,500 mg per day for most adults. And limit your intake of red and processed meats, saturated fats and sugar-sweetened foods and beverages.



2 Get Active



Regular physical activity is important. Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise (or a combination of both) each week. Preferably, the activity should be spread throughout the week. In addition, two days per week of moderate- to high-intensity muscle-strengthening activity is recommended.





Moderate to vigorous activities include brisk walking, jogging, running, basketball, rowing, swimming, soccer and tennis. 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. Just move more and sit less!

Generally, you don't need to talk to your health care professional before becoming physically active unless you have a chronic condition. However, they can provide advice on the types of activities that are best for you and ways to progress at a safe and steady pace.



3 Stop Smoking



Not smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health. That includes e-cigarettes and vaping. Tobacco is one of the leading causes of preventable death in the United States. Both traditional and e-cigarette smoking and regular exposure to other people's smoke increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. If you smoke, get help to quit. As soon as you stop smoking, your risk of heart disease and stroke starts to drop.

You're more likely to quit tobacco for good if you prepare by creating a plan that fits your lifestyle.

1. Set a quit date within the next 7 days.
2. Choose a method: cold turkey or gradually.
3. Decide if you need help from a health care professional, nicotine replacement or prescription medicine.
4. Prepare for your quit day by planning how to deal with cravings and urges.
5. Quit on your quit day.

You can call **1-800-Quit Now (1-800-784-8669)** for free smoking cessation information, advice and support.

4 Get Enough Sleep



Getting a good night's sleep every night is vital to cardiovascular health. Good sleep benefits your whole body including your heart and brain with effects such as improved mood, memory and reasoning.

The amount and quality of sleep you get can influence your eating habits, mood, memory, internal organs and more. Too much or too little can be harmful.

Adults should aim for an average of 7 to 9 hours a night, and babies and kids need more depending on their age.



You can make small changes in your daily habits that could make a big difference in the quality of your sleep.

- Be physically active during the day to help reduce stress and sleep better.
- Establish a bedtime routine. Try to go to bed and wake up at about the same time each day.
- Break the snooze button habit. Sleeping past your alarm can make you groggier.
- Keep your phone and electronic devices out of the bedroom. Electronics can sabotage your sleep cycle. Try reading or listening to music before bed instead.

5 Maintain a Healthy Weight



It's important to reach and maintain a healthy weight. Strive for a BMI from 18.5 to 24.9. To find your BMI, multiply your weight in pounds by 703 and divide by your height in inches. Then divide again by your height in inches. Or visit [heart.org/bmi](https://www.heart.org/bmi).

Overweight is a BMI from 25 to 29.9. Obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI) of 30.0 kg/m² or greater.

Larger waistlines (35 inches or more for women and 40 inches or more for men) are also associated with higher risk. If you have too much body fat, especially at the waist, you have a higher risk for health problems. These include heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

If you're overweight, work to reach and maintain a healthy weight by eating fewer calories and moving more. Follow the American Heart Association guidelines for a healthy eating plan and watch your calories and the amount of saturated fats, trans fats, added sugars and sodium you eat.



6 Control Cholesterol



Cholesterol is part of a healthy body. But having too much of it in your blood can be a problem. High cholesterol can cause blocked arteries. This can lead to heart disease and stroke.

You should have your cholesterol checked every four to six years as part of an overall cardiovascular risk assessment as long as your risk remains low. If other factors put you at higher risk for heart disease or stroke, your health care professional may want to check it more often.



Life's Essential 8 metrics for cholesterol recommend monitoring non-HDL cholesterol rather than total cholesterol because non-HDL cholesterol can be measured without fasting and is a more reliable calculation in all people.

You can lower your cholesterol with diet changes, regular physical activity, weight loss and medications.

Read food labels to make sure you choose foods low in saturated and trans fats. Limit your saturated fat intake to less than 6% of total calories and avoid trans fats.





7 Control Blood Sugar



It's important to know your blood glucose number. Two common glucose tests are the fasting plasma glucose test, or FPG, and the HbA1C test, or A1C, which is done without fasting.

The A1C test works well in individuals with or without diabetes, and it tracks glucose control among diabetic patients better.

A healthy non-diabetic adult should have an FPG reading of less than 100 mg/dL or an A1C of less than 5.7%. If your fasting blood sugar level is between 100 mg/dL and 125 mg/dL or your A1C is between 5.7% and 6.4%, you have "pre-diabetes." Pre-diabetes can lead to diabetes, which increases your risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

If you have diabetes, it's important to work with your health care team to manage it and control any other risk factors you have.

8 Manage Blood Pressure



Have your blood pressure checked regularly. High blood pressure makes your heart work harder. That puts more strain on the heart and arteries. You may have high blood pressure if your systolic pressure is 130 mm Hg or higher, or diastolic pressure is 80 mm Hg or higher, and stays high over time. A single high reading is not an immediate cause for alarm.

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 some lifestyle changes such as not smoking, eating a healthier diet (including potassium-rich foods, such as avocado, green leafy vegetables and bananas), 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, your health care professional may also put you on medication.



What's Your Heart Score?

Many things in your daily life impact your health. This can include money problems, housing concerns, and access to transportation, food and child care. If you can't get to medical appointments, you may not receive the care you need to address all of the components of Life's Essential 8™. When money is tight, it also may be difficult to pay for medicines. And living far from a grocery store can make it hard to buy healthy food.

If you have concerns in any of these or other areas, talk with your health care team or a trusted community leader. They may know of local resources to assist you. Or they may have a staff person who can help.

You can learn where you stand with Life's Essential 8 in a few minutes. To get your personal heart score and a custom plan with the eight steps you need to start living your best life, visit heart.org/MyLifeCheck.

Remember, you can stop heart disease before it even starts. Start small and keep it simple. Make one change today and then you're ready to make another. Before you know it, making life choices that benefit your heart will be a healthy habit.

For More Information

We want people to experience more of life's precious moments. To do that, we want you to be healthier — in heart and mind. It's why our mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

For more information on My Life Check, call **1-888-242-4503** or email **workforce@heart.org**.

We have created many educational booklets like this to help you and your family make healthier choices to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke, manage your condition or care for a loved one.

To learn more, call us toll-free at **1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721)** or contact your nearest American Heart Association office. You can also visit **heart.org**.

For information on stroke, call **1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653)** or visit **stroke.org**.

Heart Attack Warning Signs

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most of them start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort.

Here are some signs of a heart attack:

- **Chest discomfort.** Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- **Discomfort in other areas of the upper body.** Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- **Shortness of breath.** This may occur with or without chest discomfort.
- **Other signs.** These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women may experience other symptoms that are typically less associated with heart attack, such as shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.

Stroke Warning Signs

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, or trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

F.A.S.T. is an easy way to remember how to recognize a stroke and what to do: **F**ace drooping. **A**rm weakness. **S**peech difficulty. **T**ime to call 911.

Dial 911 Fast

Heart attack and stroke are life-or-death emergencies — every second counts. If you suspect you or someone you are with has any of the symptoms of heart attack or stroke, **immediately call 911 or your emergency response number** so an ambulance can be sent. **Don't delay — get help right away!**

For a stroke, also note the time when the first symptom(s) appeared. If given within 3 to 4.5 hours of the start of symptoms, treatment may result in better outcomes.

For heart- or risk-related information,
call the American Heart Association at
1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721)
or visit **heart.org**.

For stroke information, call our American Stroke
Association at **1-888-4-STROKE (1-888-478-7653)** or
visit **stroke.org**. For information on life after stroke,
call and ask for the Stroke Family Support Network.

For more information on My Life Check,
call **1-888-242-4503** or email **workforce@heart.org**.

The statistics in this brochure were up-to-date at publication.
For the latest statistics, see the Heart Disease
and Stroke Statistics Update at **heart.org/statistics**.



**American
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