How Can I Make My Lifestyle Healthier?

It’s never too late to make better health choices. All you need is a goal, a plan and the desire to live better. Here are some simple steps to take:

• Don’t smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products.
• Have your blood pressure checked regularly. Keep your blood pressure below 120/80 mm Hg.
• Eat a healthy diet consistent with recommendations from the American Heart Association.
• Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (or a combination) each week.
• Reach and maintain a healthy weight (body mass index between 18.5 and 24.9 kg/m²).
• Have your cholesterol checked. Talk to your doctor about your numbers and how they impact your overall risk.
• Keep your fasting blood glucose at less than 100 mg/dL.

How do I stop smoking?

• Decide on a Quit Day and ask your family and friends to support you.
• Ask your healthcare provider for information, programs and medications that may help.
• Go where smoking isn’t allowed, and avoid being around people who smoke.
• Keep busy doing things that make it hard to smoke.

How do I manage my blood pressure?

• If your doctor has put you on medication, take it exactly as prescribed.
• If you are overweight, work to reach and maintain a healthy weight.
• Be more physically active.
• Reduce your salt (sodium) intake.
• Eat a heart-healthy diet.

How do I change my eating habits?

• Eat a diet rich in vegetables and fruits.
• Choose whole-grain foods and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.
• Eat at least 8 ounces of non-fried fish each week, which may be divided over two 3.5- to 4-ounce servings. Choose fish high in omega-3 fatty acids such as salmon, trout and herring.
• Select skinless poultry and choose lean cuts of meat. But, limit your intake of red meats.
• Include legumes, nuts and seeds.
• Use healthy fats and oils, such as olive, canola, corn or safflower.
• Limit how much saturated fat, trans fat and added sugars you eat.
• Choose and prepare foods with little or no sodium (salt). Aim to consume less than 2,300 milligrams (mgs) a day and an ideal limit of less than 1,500 mg per day for most adults.
• If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation.
What about physical activity?
- Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (or a combination) each week.
- Include muscle-strengthening activity at least two days per week for additional health benefits.
- Look for ways to be more active. Take 10- to 15-minute walking breaks during the day or after meals.

How can I reach and maintain a healthy weight?
- To lose weight, you must take in fewer calories than you use.
- Follow an overall heart-healthy diet.
- Get and stay physically active.

How do I manage my cholesterol?
- Get your cholesterol checked at least once every five years. Start at age 20. Talk to your doctor about your numbers and how they impact your overall risk.
- Limit your saturated fat intake to less than 5 to 6 percent of total calories.
- Look for foods with “0” grams of trans fat.
- If your doctor has put you on medication, take it exactly as prescribed.

What can I do to reduce my blood sugar?
- Reduce your intake of simple sugars that are found in soda, candy and sugary desserts.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Take medications or insulin if it is prescribed for you.

How CAN I LEARN MORE?
1. Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit heart.org to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
2. Sign up to get Heart Insight, a free magazine for heart patients and their families, at heartinsight.org.
3. Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at heart.org/supportnetwork.

Do you have questions for the doctor or nurse?
Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

For example:
What’s the most important change I can make?
What if I go back to bad habits?

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk, manage disease or care for a loved one. Visit heart.org/answersbyheart to learn more.