

Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations



A healthy diet and lifestyle are your best weapons to fight cardiovascular disease. It's not as hard as you may think! Remember, it's the overall pattern of your choices that counts.

Make the simple steps below part of your life for long-term benefits to your health and your heart.

Use up at least as many calories as you take in.

Start by knowing [how many calories](#) you should be eating and drinking to maintain your weight. Don't eat more calories than you know you can burn up every day. Increase the amount and intensity of your physical activity to match the number of calories you take in. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week or — best of all — at least 30 minutes every day. Regular physical activity can help you maintain your weight, keep off weight that you lose and help you reach physical and cardiovascular fitness. If you can't do at least 30 minutes at one time, you can add up 10-minute sessions throughout the day. [more](#)

Eat a variety of nutritious foods from all the food groups.

You may be eating plenty of food, but your body may not be getting the nutrients it needs to be healthy. Nutrient-rich foods have vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients but are lower in calories. To get the nutrients you need, choose foods like vegetables, fruits, whole-grain products and fat-free or low-fat dairy products most often. [more](#)



- Vegetables and fruits are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber — and they're low in calories. Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables may help you control your weight and your blood pressure.
- Unrefined whole-grain foods contain fiber that can help lower your blood cholesterol and help you feel full, which may help you manage your weight.
- Eat fish at least twice a week. Recent research shows that eating oily fish containing omega-3 fatty acids (for example, salmon, trout, and herring) may help lower your risk of death from coronary artery disease.

Eat less of the nutrient-poor foods.

The right number of calories to eat each day is based on your age and physical activity level and whether you're trying to gain, lose or maintain your weight. You could use your daily allotment of calories on a few high-calorie foods and beverages, but you probably wouldn't get the nutrients your body needs to be healthy. Limit foods and beverages high in calories but low in nutrients, and limit how much saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol and sodium. Read labels carefully — the Nutrition Facts panel will tell you how much of those nutrients each food or beverage contains.

As you make daily food choices, base your eating pattern on these [recommendations](#):

- Choose lean meats and poultry without skin and prepare them without added saturated and trans fat.
- Select fat-free, 1 percent fat, and low-fat dairy products.
- Cut back on foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils to reduce *trans* fat in your diet.
- Cut back on foods high in dietary cholesterol. Aim to eat less than 300 milligrams of cholesterol each day.
- Cut back on beverages and foods with added sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Aim to eat less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day.
- If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation. That means one drink per day if you're a woman and two drinks per day if you're a man.
- Follow the American Heart Association recommendations when you eat out, and keep an eye on your portion sizes.

Also, don't smoke tobacco — and stay away from tobacco smoke.
[more](#)

For more information on the American Heart Association Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations. . .

- Download our [podcast](#).
- Read the [scientific statement](#) in the American Heart Association journal, *Circulation*.
- Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 to order a free consumer-friendly brochure.

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