



A guide to understanding heart disease risk factors –  
and learning ways to help your heart to better health



# Let's start at the heart of it

As the hardest-working muscle in your body, your heart is essential for just about everything that keeps your body healthy – from pumping blood to delivering oxygen and nutrients to your cells.

Getting smart about heart health may have long term benefits for your overall well-being. With help from this guide, you'll learn about common risks for heart disease, how to reduce those risks, and steps to move you toward a heart-healthier lifestyle.

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# A closer look at heart disease

Heart disease – also known as cardiovascular disease – is the leading cause of death in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> It prevents the heart from pumping blood the way it should. That means blood may have trouble getting to the heart, lungs and other organs.

## Common risk factors

Anyone can develop heart disease, but you may be more at risk if you have certain health conditions. Take heart, though: Some risk factors can be controlled, and it may be possible to prevent, stabilize or even improve some of the causes of heart disease.



### Diabetes

Diabetes and heart disease often go hand-in-hand – because, over time, high blood sugar levels can harm blood vessels and the nerves that control the heart. People with diabetes are 2 times more likely to have a heart attack or stroke.<sup>2</sup> Keeping blood sugar in a healthy range may help fend off some of that extra risk.



### High blood pressure

High blood pressure can do damage throughout the body and may raise the risk of heart failure, kidney disease, blindness and more. One slightly above-normal reading may not be a problem. But when readings on 2 or more occasions are elevated, it may be a concern – and a signal for action.



### High cholesterol

It's normal to have some cholesterol. But if levels aren't on target, the stage can be set for clogged arteries – and a heart attack or stroke. Having your cholesterol checked is a good way to know where you stand.



### Overweight or obesity

Carrying around extra pounds may take a toll on the heart – and may raise the risk of heart disease. Losing even a modest amount of weight – 5-7% of your weight – may help improve health.<sup>2</sup>



### Physical inactivity

People who are inactive are nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease as those who are active.<sup>3</sup> Aerobic exercise benefits the heart and lungs the most, but even modest amounts of physical activity are good for health. Generally speaking, most adults should aim for at least 2.5 hours a week of moderate aerobic physical activity\* – such as taking a walk, raking the yard or swimming.



### Smoking

Quitting smoking is one of the most important things people can do to reduce their risk for heart disease.<sup>4</sup> People who smoke are 2 to 4 times more likely to develop heart disease than nonsmokers.<sup>4</sup> The good news is that as soon as someone quits smoking, their risk begins to go down – and continues to decrease over time.<sup>4</sup>

\*For safety's sake, talk with your doctor before significantly increasing your activity level.

# Have a heart-to-heart with your primary doctor

Taking care of your heart is important to your overall health. A good way to learn about heart disease risk factors is by getting in touch with your primary doctor. A primary doctor may also be called a primary care provider (PCP). No matter the name, you can think of them as your heart health guide. They know your health history and health goals – and can help you learn ways to protect your heart’s health.

## Questions to start the convo

Here are some important heart-health questions you might ask your primary doctor at your next checkup:

**“What should my blood pressure be? How often should it be checked?”**

**“What should my cholesterol and triglyceride levels be? How often should they be checked?”**

**“What’s a healthy weight for me?”**

**“Can you suggest any resources that could help me lose weight or stop smoking?”**

**“Should I be screened for diabetes? What should my blood sugar level be?”**

**“What lifestyle changes would you recommend for me?”**

**“How can I make sure I’m taking my prescription medications the right way? And what should I do if I’m having side effects?”**

## To find a network doctor:



- Scan this code with your phone
- Sign in at [myuhc.com](https://myuhc.com)® and select **Find Care & Costs > Primary Care Providers**
- Use the UnitedHealthcare® app

# Get in on heart-healthy programs

Your health plan includes access to wellness programs and resources that are designed to help support healthier habits, a healthier heart and better overall health. What's more, they're available at no additional cost to you. You can also search for local services and programs that may offer free or reduced-cost medical care, food, housing, transportation and more on **Your Connection to Community Resources**.



## Get help managing a condition

Our **Disease Management Programs** offer personalized support from a nurse for chronic conditions including:

- Asthma
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Coronary artery disease (CAD)
- Diabetes
- Heart failure
- Hyperlipidemia
- Hypertension

Call **1-800-382-7513** to get started.

## Healthier starts with Rally

Have fun and get healthier with **Rally®**, a digital experience that's designed to help you achieve your health goals – from being more active to eating better – and reward you along the way. When you join Rally, you'll:

- Take a health survey and use your results to set goals
- Get personalized recommendations to build healthier habits
- Earn points for almost everything, from logging in regularly to completing healthy actions, and redeem them for meaningful rewards

With Rally, healthier living has its rewards.

## Tap into mental health support

Get connected to self-help digital tools, in-person or virtual **mental health** providers and other resources that may help with a variety of concerns, such as:

- Stress, depression and anxiety
- Relationship difficulties, grief and loss
- Medication management and substance use issues
- Compulsive habits and eating disorders

Sometimes you may need someone to talk to – so it's nice to know that support is available.

## Quit tobacco for good with Quit For Life

With a coach on your side, it may be easier to leave tobacco behind. **The Quit For Life®** program includes:

- Online tools, resources and a Live Tobacco-Free course
- Support from a Quit Coach®, who can help you create a personalized Action Plan
- Quit For Life mobile app, with 24/7 urge management support
- Text2Quit® text messages for daily tips and encouragement

Get the tips, tools and personal support you may need to quit your way.

## Build healthier habits with Real Appeal

Connect with a community of support with **Real Appeal®**, an online weight loss program designed to inspire healthier behaviors. It includes:

- Online, coach-led group sessions that focus on a variety of wellness topics
- A Success Kit with kitchen tools and guides delivered to your door
- Motivational resources and a personalized online dashboard to track your progress

As part of the Real Appeal community, you'll have the support of other members to help cheer you on – right from the start.

## Advocates offer support with a personal touch

When you call an Advocate, you'll be connected with someone who's specially trained to help answer your questions. Advocates have access to a team of professionals skilled in clinical care, emotional health and more – and they're here to help you:

- Understand your benefits
- Make more informed health care decisions
- Access the care that fits your needs

To talk with an Advocate, call **1-800-382-7513** or use the click-to-chat function at **myuhc.com**.

# Tips for living healthier every day

It's never too late, or too early, to take steps to protect your heart by making heart-healthy choices. Here are a few tips to get started.



## Tip 1: Eat smart

Making small yet simple changes to your diet may make a big difference. Stocking your pantry and fridge with the good things your heart deserves may help you eat healthier – and help lower your risk of heart disease. Focus on these 5 love-your-heart foods:

- 1 Fruits and veggies**  
For a wide range of nutrients, go for a colorful medley of fresh produce.
- 2 Whole grains**  
Select whole-grain breads, pastas, tortillas and cereals. Other options to embrace include brown rice, wild rice, bulgur, quinoa and oatmeal.
- 3 Lean proteins**  
Consider skinless poultry, seafood and lean cuts of other meats, such as round or loin. Some varieties of fish – such as salmon and trout – offer heart-friendly omega-3 fatty acids too.\* And how about being ready with a few meatless protein choices? You might choose beans, tofu or unsalted nuts and seeds.
- 4 Low-fat dairy products**  
Go fat-free or low-fat when it comes to milk, cheese, yogurt and other dairy choices.
- 5 Healthy oils**  
Reach for unsaturated, heart-healthy vegetable oils, such as olive, canola, corn, safflower or sunflower.



## Tip 2: Get active

Remember that something may be better than nothing, so try your best to incorporate physical activity into your routine every day. Here are 3 ways to get pumped about getting active:

- 1 Focus on fun**  
You're more likely to stick with activities you enjoy. So whether it's basketball, biking or walking laps around a mall, try to find fitness pursuits that make you happy.
- 2 Bring along a buddy**  
Ask a friend to join your heart-healthy mission – and cheer each other on. Meet for walks and talks. Or team up for a fun run.
- 3 Seize the moment**  
Throughout your day, find times to squeeze in short bursts of activity. Aim for at least 10 minutes at a time. Maybe that's a quick stroll around the block or a quick set of lunges between loads of laundry or conference calls.

### Looking for a new way to get active?

Find a routine that's right for you, starting at less than \$1 per day. With One Pass Select™:

- Access a large gym network, including national fitness centers and boutique studios
- Use any location in your network tier at no additional cost
- Change tiers monthly to create a routine that fits your lifestyle
- Cancel your membership at any time by giving a 30-day notice
- Add friends and family members (18+) and get a 10% discount on their memberships
- Get a grocery delivery subscription with tiers Classic or above

Get started at [onepassselect.com](https://onepassselect.com).

\*Certain people are encouraged to eat fish that is low in mercury. This includes women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children. **Learn more** about mercury in fish.

## Tip 3: Reduce stress

Some stress is unavoidable, but there are healthy ways to help manage it. Here are 3 techniques to try:

### 1 Be proactive

Declutter your day by crossing off any to-dos that aren't musts – or bump them to another day. If there's a stressful day coming up, plan ahead by packing a nutritious lunch and getting a good night's sleep.

### 2 Soothe stress when it strikes

Take a breather: Close your eyes and take slow, deep breaths to help yourself relax. Or try taking a quick stroll. It may ease tension in the moment.

### 3 Regroup and unwind

Kick back for a few minutes after a stressful day. Turn on a calming playlist – or just take a quiet moment to collect your thoughts. Another option? Talk with a supportive loved one or friend. It might help you feel better – and it might help you see challenges in new ways.



## Keep in mind

Everyone may have “off” days, so it's good to remember that a healthier lifestyle is your goal for the long term.

## Mental health support at your pace

You may have heard about or even used the Calm app. Now you have access to its most popular features and much more with Calm Health. Available through your benefits at no additional cost to you, it includes content written by licensed psychologists.

Work toward well-being goals like:

- Getting better sleep
- Building skills to manage stress
- Developing resiliency
- Starting and building a mindfulness habit

It's all self-guided, so you can go at your own pace.

Get started at [uhc.app/calm](https://uhc.app/calm)

## Want to learn more?



Get heart-healthy tips, eating plans and more at [uhc.com/hearthealth](https://uhc.com/hearthealth).

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Deaths and mortality. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>. Last reviewed Oct. 25, 2024. Accessed Jan. 28, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Diabetes and your heart. <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/diabetes-complications/diabetes-and-your-heart.html>. Last reviewed May 15, 2024. Accessed Jan. 28, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Get regular physical activity. [nhlbi.nih.gov/health/heart-healthy-living/physical-activity](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/heart-healthy-living/physical-activity). Last updated March 24, 2022. Accessed Jan. 28, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Effects of Cigarettes: Cardiovascular Disease. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/about/cigarettes-and-cardiovascular-disease.html>. Last reviewed Sept. 17, 2024. Accessed Jan. 28, 2025.

Real Appeal is a voluntary weight management program that is offered to eligible members at no additional cost as part of their benefit plan. The information provided under this program is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be nor should be construed as medical and/or nutritional advice. Participants should consult an appropriate health care professional to determine what may be right for them. Results, if any, may vary. Any items/tools that are provided may be taxable and participants should consult an appropriate tax professional to determine any tax obligations they may have from receiving items/tools under the program.

The Quit For Life program provides information regarding tobacco cessation methods and related well-being support. Any health information provided by you is kept confidential in accordance with the law. The Quit For Life program does not provide clinical treatment or medical services and should not be considered a substitute for your doctor's care. Please discuss with your doctor how the information provided is right for you. Participation in this program is voluntary. If you have specific health care needs or questions, consult an appropriate health care professional. This service should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Rally Health® provides health and well-being information and support as part of your health plan. It does not provide medical advice or other health services, and is not a substitute for your doctor's care. If you have specific health care needs, consult an appropriate health care professional. Participation in the health survey is voluntary. Your responses will be kept confidential in accordance with the law and will only be used to provide health and wellness recommendations or conduct other plan activities.

One Pass Select is a voluntary program featuring a subscription-based nationwide gym network, digital fitness and grocery delivery service. The information provided under this program is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be nor should be construed as medical advice. Individuals should consult an appropriate health care professional before beginning any exercise program and/or to determine what may be right for them. Purchasing discounted gym and fitness studio memberships, digital fitness or grocery delivery services may have tax implications. Employers and individuals should consult an appropriate tax professional to determine if they have any tax obligations with respect to the purchase of these discounted memberships or services under this program, as applicable. One Pass Select is a program offered by Optum. Subscription costs are payable to Optum.

Calm Health is not intended to diagnose or treat depression, anxiety, or any other disease or condition. The use of Calm Health is not a substitute for care by a physician or other health care provider. Any questions that you may have regarding the diagnosis, care, or treatment of a medical condition should be directed to your physician or health care provider. Calm Health is a mental wellness product.

Advocate4Me services should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. The information provided through Advocate services is for informational purposes only and provided as part of your health plan. Wellness nurses, coaches and other representatives cannot diagnose problems or recommend treatment and are not a substitute for your doctor's care. Your health information is kept confidential in accordance with the law. Advocate services are not an insurance program and may be discontinued at any time.