



Action Steps for Heart Health

There are many things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease. Managing your weight, controlling your blood pressure, or quitting smoking, can all reduce your risk. There are certain risk factors for heart disease you can't do much about, such as family history, age, and sex.

Be physically active: Physical activity can lower cholesterol, improve blood pressure, help you lose weight, and improve your mood. Walking, dancing, stretching and even doing housework—anything that gets your body moving—is helpful! It's a good idea to check with your health care provider before beginning an exercise program.



Aim for a healthy diet: Here are some helpful diet tips for reducing your heart disease risk:

Limit saturated fat, trans fat, and dietary cholesterol. These types of fats can raise your total cholesterol. *Saturated fat* and *cholesterol* are often found in foods that come from animals, such as meat and dairy products. *Trans fat* are often found in processed foods, such as French fries, cookies and crackers. Try low-fat or fat-free milk and dairy products, eat lean meats, and choose healthy snack foods, such as granola, nuts and dried fruits in place of processed snack foods.

Replace saturated and trans fat with unsaturated fat. Unsaturated fat helps increase HDL, or “good” cholesterol. Plant oils, like canola or olive oil, as well as nuts, seeds, avocado and fish are all good sources.

Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. If fresh fruits and vegetables are not the best option for your situation, dried or frozen fruits and vegetables are great alternatives.

Increase your fiber intake. Fiber can help lower your cholesterol. Whole grain breads, pastas, cereals, beans, and many fruits and vegetables are good sources of fiber.

Limit sodium (salt) intake. Foods that are high in salt can raise your blood pressure. Choose foods that are low in sodium, and limit the amount of salt you add to your food. Try spices to flavor your food in place of salt.

Reduce stress: Stress is a part of life, but too much can increase your risk for heart disease. Try to find ways to reduce stress, such as making time for your favorite activities or asking family and friends for help when you need it.

Heart Health Action Plan Think of steps you can take to improve your heart health. We've given you some ideas above, or feel free to come up with your own. Remember, no step is too small when making a change! Choose goals that seem like they'd be the easiest for you to start with, and think about how you would accomplish them. When writing your goals and action steps, be as specific as possible. Have fun!