

# HAPPY HEART MONTH

From Central Alabama Aging Consortium



**Central Alabama Aging Consortium**  
Connecting You to Services

# Self-Care

## Tips for Heart Health



**Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, but there's a lot you can do to prevent it. Taking time to care for your heart can be challenging as you go about daily life. But it's easier than you think to show your heart the love it deserves each day. Small acts of self-care, like taking walks, getting quality sleep, and cooking healthy meals, help your heart. Research shows that self-care can help you keep your blood pressure in a healthy range and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.**



### What does “self-care” mean?

Researchers define self-care as what you do to stay healthy. It's also what you do to care for any health problems you have, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or mental health disorders. It's [heart-healthy living](#).

### What parts of your self-care routine help your heart?

Self-care for your heart is really self-care for your whole self. You can improve and protect your health overall when you:

- ✓ Get a daily dose of [physical activity](#), such as a brisk, 30-minute walk.
- ✓ Cook meals that are low in sodium and unhealthy fats.
- ✓ Take your medications as prescribed and keep your medical appointments.
- ✓ Sleep 7-8 hours a night.
- ✓ Manage stress through, for example, meditation, yoga, a warm bath, or quiet time with a good book or funny movie.
- ✓ Try to reach or stay at a healthy weight by moving more and having snacks like fruits and veggies ready to grab when hunger hits.

### How can you make self-care for your heart easier?

The trick is to plan ahead. Build heart-healthy activities into your daily self-care routine. Schedule things that are both good for you and important to you. You might want to set aside time to:

- ✓ Cook delicious, heart-healthy recipes. Choose some from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's delicious heart-healthy eating [website](#).
- ✓ Go for a bike ride, take an online exercise class, or have a family dance party.
- ✓ Make that doctor's appointment you've been putting off. Many providers now offer telehealth appointments to make accessing care easier.
- ✓ Organize your medications.

### What's your health status?

Part of self-care is knowing your health status. Even during uncertain and busy times, get your blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels checked. Talk to your health care provider about your heart health.



## How can technology help with caring for your heart?

Your phone or favorite show can make getting off the couch difficult. But technology can be your heart's best friend! Tools that help with self-care for your heart include:

- ✓ Wearable devices that measure steps, heart rate, and sleep
- ✓ At-home blood pressure, blood sugar, and heart rate monitors
- ✓ Online activity and healthy eating [planners](#), like these from [health.gov](#) and [MyPlate.gov](#)

## How does support from others help you care for your heart?

Many studies show that having positive, close relationships and feeling connected to others helps our blood pressure, weight, overall health, and more. Even if it's virtual, that support makes self-care easier and even more effective.

Research also shows that text messages can improve self-care. Connect with friends or family for support. Ask them to text you reminders or encouragement to help you meet your goals. Make new friends who share your goals. Join an online exercise class or a weight-management group to connect with other like-minded people and stay motivated.

## How does self-care play a role if you or your partner is pregnant or considering pregnancy?

Self-care for your heart health is particularly important if you're pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant. Regular physical activity reduces your risk of gestational diabetes, extra pregnancy pounds, and postpartum depression. Talk to your health care provider about what physical activities are safe during pregnancy and soon after delivery. Discuss how to avoid and watch for a type of high blood pressure called [preeclampsia](#).



## What are the obstacles to self-care?

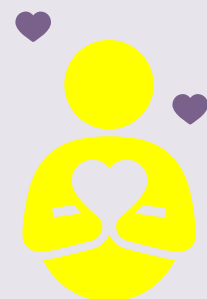
Research shows that the three main obstacles to self-care are:

- Lack of confidence in one's ability to make a change
- Depression
- Having more than one health concern

If you want to boost your confidence, or if you struggle with a mental health disorder, seek support of family and friends, or talk to a qualified mental health provider. Ask your health care provider for help handling the demands of multiple medical conditions.

## What does it take to give your heart the care—and patience—it deserves?

Self-care includes being patient with your body. You may not see or feel the results of your efforts right away. But small steps can lead to big progress. When we take care of #OurHearts as part of our self-care, we set an example for others to do the same. Visit [hearttruth.gov](#) for resources and tools to help you and your loved ones make heart-healthy lifestyle changes.



# Tips on What to Eat vs. Limit

**DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) is a flexible and balanced eating plan that helps create a heart-healthy eating style for life.** It does not require any special foods and provides daily and weekly nutritional goals. The DASH eating plan supports overall heart health and helps lower high blood pressure and LDL “bad” cholesterol.



**Eat This**



**Limit This**

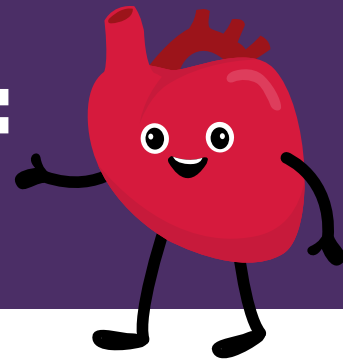
	Vegetables		Fatty meats
	Fruits		
	Whole grains		Full-fat dairy
	Fat-free or low-fat dairy		
	Fish		Sugar sweetened beverages
	Poultry		
	Beans		Sweets
	Nuts & seeds		
	Vegetable oils		Sodium intake

## This plan recommends:

- Eating vegetables, fruits, and whole grains
- Eating foods rich in potassium, calcium, magnesium, fiber, and protein
- Choosing low-or reduced-sodium, or no-salt-added versions of foods
- Including fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans, nuts, and vegetable oils
- Limiting foods that are high in saturated fat, such as fatty meats, full-fat dairy products, and tropical oils such as coconut, palm kernel, and palm oils
- Limiting sugar-sweetened beverages and sweets

**Find recipes, tools, and resources at**  
[nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/DASH)

# Take Action for Your Heart: Get Started!



**Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, but it can often be prevented. Adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle can help you reduce the risk of heart disease and its risk factors. Take action to protect your heart by following these tips.**



## Get Enough Quality Sleep

**Lack of sleep or getting poor-quality sleep increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions.**

- Try to aim for 7-9 hours of sleep a night.
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Exercise regularly, but not within 2-3 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine and nicotine.



## Eat Better

**A flexible and balanced eating plan can help lower your high blood pressure and improve your cholesterol.**

- Follow the **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan**, which can help you create a heart-healthy eating style for life.
- Read nutrition labels to pick the food lowest in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars.
- Try a mix of lean cuts of meat, eat fish once or twice a week, and eat two or more meatless meals each week.
- Consider whole fruits, dried fruits, unsalted rice cakes, fat-free and low-fat yogurt, or raw vegetables as a snack.



## Maintain a Healthy Weight

**Maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall health and can help you prevent and control many diseases and conditions.**

- Choose healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables, yogurt, or nuts, instead of sugary or high-calorie snacks.
- Stay hydrated with water as your primary beverage.
- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise (such as brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity (like running) exercise per week.
- Consider keeping a log of what you eat throughout the day.



## Be More Active

**Getting enough physical activity helps to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.**

- Adults should spend at least 150 minutes (2 ½ hours) each week doing physical activity.
- Sit less! Take the stairs. Park farther away. March in place or take a walk around the block.
- Try muscle-strengthening activities like lifting weights, working with resistance bands, doing sit-ups and push-ups, or some forms of yoga—whatever works for you.
- If you don't have a lot of time in your day, try being active for 10 minutes at a time. Anything that gets your heart beating faster counts!



## Stop Smoking

**Any amount of smoking, even light or occasional smoking, damages your heart and blood vessels.**

- Select a quit date and write yourself a contract that outlines your **plan for quitting**.
- Talk with your healthcare provider about programs and products that can help you quit.
- Join a support group. Many hospitals, workplaces, and community groups offer classes to help people quit smoking.
- Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW and visit [smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov) to get additional support.



## **Control Cholesterol**

**Unhealthy levels of cholesterol can lead to high cholesterol, which increases the risk of developing heart disease.**

- Try the **Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLC) Program** which combines diet, physical activity, and weight management to help lower high blood cholesterol and improve heart health.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet that is low in saturated fats, as these can raise LDL cholesterol levels.
- Limit alcohol consumption. Drinking too much alcohol—more than two drinks a day for men or one drink a day for women—can raise your total cholesterol level.



## **Manage Stress**

**Learning how to manage stress with healthy coping strategies helps improve your emotional and physical health.**

- Use relaxation techniques that combine breathing and focused attention on pleasing thoughts and images to calm the mind and body.
- Consider meditation, as it can help to **lower stress**.
- Take a yoga class to help lower stress and improve mindfulness. It may also offer you a supportive community.

## **Manage Blood Sugar**

**Maintaining stable blood sugar levels is crucial for heart health, especially for people with diabetes or those at risk of developing diabetes.**

- Eat a diet rich in whole foods, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
- Monitor your carbohydrate intake and choose complex carbohydrates, like whole grains and legumes, to help control blood sugar levels.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about how often you should check your blood sugar levels, especially if you have diabetes.

## **Control Blood Pressure**

**Keep your blood pressure in a healthy range and keep track of your numbers. Blood pressure that's consistently higher than 130/80 mm Hg can cause serious health problems.**

- Have your blood pressure checked each time you visit the doctor.
- Use a blood pressure monitor to measure your blood pressure at home and **learn how to measure it correctly**.
- Use a **blood pressure tracker** to keep a record of your numbers each reading.
- If you're pregnant or planning to be, it's especially important to keep your blood pressure in a healthy range.

## **Practice Self-Care & Find Social Support**

**Daily acts of self-care can benefit your heart because self-care is heart care. Studies show that having positive social support, close relationships, and feeling connected to others makes it easier to stick to heart-healthy habits.**

- Try to do at least one positive action for your heart health each day.
- Make the doctor's appointment you've been putting off.
- Ask family and friends to text you reminders or encouragement to help you meet your health goals.
- Join an exercise class or a weight management group to connect with other like-minded people and stay motivated.

For more information about how you can take action to keep your heart healthy, visit [hearttruth.gov](https://hearttruth.gov)





# Know the Difference

## Cardiovascular Disease, Heart Disease, Coronary Heart Disease



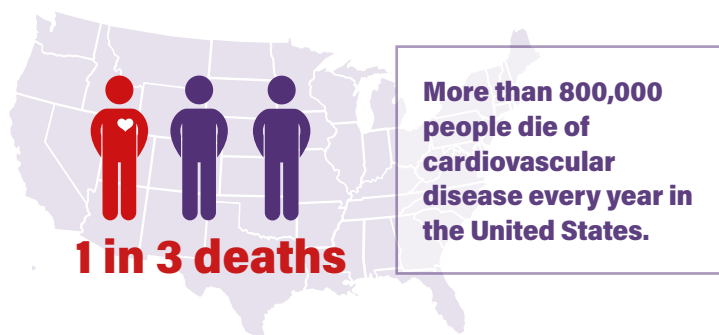
### Cardiovascular disease, heart disease, coronary heart disease — what's the difference?

Because these terms sound so similar, people use them interchangeably. This fact sheet will help you understand how these conditions differ.

### Cardiovascular Disease

#### The big umbrella

Cardiovascular disease is the term for all types of diseases that affect the heart or blood vessels, including **coronary heart disease** (clogged arteries), which can cause heart attacks, **stroke**, **heart failure**, and **peripheral artery disease**.



### Heart Disease

#### A type of cardiovascular disease

"Heart disease" is a catch-all phrase for a variety of conditions that affect the heart's structure and function.

Keep in mind — all heart diseases are cardiovascular diseases, but not all cardiovascular diseases are heart disease.

The most common type of heart disease is coronary heart disease. In fact, when people talk about "heart disease" they often mean coronary heart disease.



**Nearly 650,000 Americans** die from heart diseases each year.

**About 11% of American adults** (that's more than 1 of every 9) have been diagnosed with heart disease.

### Coronary Heart Disease

#### A type of heart disease

Coronary heart disease is often referred to simply as "heart disease," although it's not the only type of heart disease. Another term for it is coronary artery disease.

**About 366,000 Americans** die from coronary heart disease each year.

Coronary heart disease occurs when plaque (a combination of fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances found in the blood) builds up in your arteries. You may have heard this called clogged arteries or atherosclerosis.

The plaque reduces the amount of oxygen-rich blood getting to your heart, which can cause chest pain (also called angina). Plaque can also lead to blood clots, which block blood flow and are the most common cause of a heart attack.

### What you can do to protect yourself from cardiovascular diseases?

There's a lot you can do to protect your heart.

- Ask your doctor about your **blood pressure, cholesterol, and A1C.**
- **Reduce the sodium**, and increase the fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet.
- **Be physically active.**
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Don't smoke.**
- **Manage stress.**
- **Keep your diabetes under control.**



# 28 Days Toward a Healthy Heart

Try one of these tips each day for a month, then keep up the momentum and make your favorites part of your regular routine.

#OurHearts  
are healthier together

## Day 1

Call a friend and join the [#OurHearts](#) movement.



## Day 2

Make a heart-healthy snack.

## Day 3

Schedule your annual physical. Discuss your heart health goals with your doctor.



## Day 4

Sport red today for National Wear Red Day.

## Day 5

Squat it out. Do 1 minute of squats.



## Day 6

Make today a salt-free day. Use herbs for flavor instead of salt.



## Day 7

Visit [Smokefree.gov](#) to take the first step to quitting smoking.



## Day 8

Get your blood pressure checked.

## Day 9

Walk an extra 15 minutes today.

## Day 10

Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity today.

## Day 11

Plan your menu for the week with [heart-healthy recipes](#).

## Day 12

Reduce stress using [relaxation techniques](#).

## Day 13

Give the elevator a day off and take the stairs.

## Day 14

Protect your sweetheart's heart: Plan a heart-healthy date.

## Day 15

Swap the sweets for a piece of fruit for dessert.



## Day 16

Stress less. Practice mindful meditation for 10 minutes.

## Day 17

Head to bed with enough time to get a full 7-8 hours of sleep.



## Day 18

Add a stretch break to your calendar to increase your flexibility.



## Day 19

Eat vegetarian for a day.



## Day 20

Share a funny video or joke that makes you laugh.

## Day 21

Dance for 15 minutes to your favorite music.



## Day 22

Call a relative and ask about your family health history.

## Day 23

March in place during commercial breaks to get your heart going.

## Day 24

Get a tape measure and find out the size of your waist.

## Day 25

Ask a family member or neighbor to join you for a walk.

## Day 26

Fill half of your lunch and dinner plates with vegetables.

## Day 27

See how many push-ups you can do in 1 minute.

## Day 28

Pay it forward and tell a friend about [The Heart Truth](#).

