**Join Together To Protect Your Heart and Celebrate #OurHearts During American Heart Month**

Did you know that people who have close relationships at home, work, or in their community tend to be healthier and live longer? One reason, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), is that we’re more successful meeting our health goals when we join forces with others. To underscore the point and mark American Heart Month this February, NHLBI is launching the #OurHearts movement to inspire people to protect and strengthen their hearts with the support of others.

Heart disease is the #1 cause of death in the United States, and African Americans are at a particularly high risk. Health problems that increase the risk of heart disease are common in African American communities, including being overweight and having high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and diabetes. But there’s a lot we can do to change that—and connecting with others is a start.

**Did you know?**

**African American women:** 80% are overweight, 46% have high blood pressure, 33% have high blood cholesterol, and 13% have been diagnosed with diabetes.

**African American men:** 70% are overweight, 44% have high blood pressure, 30% have high blood cholesterol, and 15% have been diagnosed with diabetes.

**Why Reaching Out Is Good**

Having positive, close relationships and feeling connected with others benefits our overall health, including our blood pressure and weight. Having people in our lives who will motivate and care for us helps, but having feelings of closeness and companionship helps our health too.

Making the following [heart healthy lifestyle changes](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/heart-healthy-lifestyle-changes) will be easier and more successful if you work with other motivated people:

* Get physically active.
* Achieve a healthy weight and maintain it.
* Eat heart healthy foods.
* Quit smoking.

Remember, you don’t have to make big changes all at once. Small steps will get you where you want to go. Here are some tips to get you going.

**Move More**

Invite family, friends, colleagues, or members of your community to join you in your efforts to be more [physically active](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/physical-activity-and-your-heart):

* Ask a colleague to walk with you on a regular basis, put the dates on both your calendars, and text or call to make sure you both show up.
* Join an exercise class at your local community center and bring a neighbor along. Carpool to make it a regular date.
* Grab your kids, put on some music, and do jumping jacks, skip rope, or just dance.
* Make your social time active and encourage everyone—family and friends alike—to think of fun things that get you off the couch and moving.

*If you have a health condition, including heart disease or high blood pressure, talk with your doctor before increasing your activity.*

***How much is enough?*** Get at least 2½ hours of physical activity eachweek—that’s just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. In addition, do muscle strengthening exercises 2 days a week. Can’t carve out a lot of time in your day? Don’t chuck your goal, chunk it! Try 10 to 15 minutes a few times a day. NHLBI’s [Move More fact sheet](https://secure-web.cisco.com/1bGsWEbRBAdjxEyfXbCSolhiNjtxgXMcpLaOWhtBOflIJIn10baVFNcEcUY3WYfM3AhhR8G91tZvlc5BDds__JQ80vosWa9GuOTKDouq2-6Urap0ZHLyzIiwKZ1gZvZrHZ2fkW7vbKoBIE0D2633ImCyForko7DpDik7jih5gywqIbHekgzxaOQDQD7Gi9yXi15ewP11mOBi0c-BxXT_stKvpepK979ljIXZHtUIzT0runrDtad-2TaPNMxc9T66K/https%3A//www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/all-publications-and-resources/move-more-making-physical-activity-routine) provides ideas to get and keep you moving.

**Aim for a Healthy Weight**

If you’re [overweight](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/overweight-and-obesity), find someone in your friend group, at work, or in your family who also wants to lose weight. (Even a little bit can help!) Check in with them regularly to stay motivated or join a weight loss program together. Do healthy activities together, like walking or playing on a neighborhood sports team, and share low-calorie, low-sodium meals or recipes. (Pregnant women should not try to lose weight, but they can exercise.)

**Eating Heart Healthy**

We tend to eat like our friends and family, so ask others close to you to join you in your effort to eat healthier. Need healthy eating ideas? Try NHLBI’s [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan) eating plan. It’s free and scientifically proven to lower blood pressure and improve blood cholesterol levels. *U.S. News & World Report* voted it one of the best diets overall.

**Quit Smoking**

To help you quit, ask others for support or join a support group. Research has shown that people are much more likely to quit if their spouse, friend, or sibling does. Social support online can also help you quit. All states have quit lines with trained counselors—call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). You’ll find many free resources to help you quit, such as apps, a motivational text service, and a chat line at the websites [BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov](https://betobaccofree.hhs.gov) and [Smokefree.gov](https://smokefree.gov/).

If you need extra motivation to quit, consider the health of your friends and family: Being around other people’s smoke, called secondhand smoke, is dangerous. Thousands of adult *nonsmokers* die of stroke, heart disease, and lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke.

**Make a Commitment**

Read [*The Heart Truth®* for Women. *The Heart Truth* for African American Women: Take Action To Protect Your Heart](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/hearttruth/downloads/pdf/THT_AfricanAmerican_FS_2016_Update_Z_Fold_V5_508v2.pdf) on the NHLBI website.

Visit [#OurHearts](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/ourhearts) for inspiration on what others around the country are doing together for their heart health. Then join the #OurHearts movement and let NHLBI know what you’re doing with friends, family, or others in your community to have a healthy heart. Tag #OurHearts to share how you're being heart healthy together.