

# Taking Care of Our Hearts, Together



**#OurHearts**  
are healthier together

**Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, causing one in four deaths each year. But there's a lot you can do to live a heart-healthy life—and connecting with others can make your efforts even more successful.**



Studies show that if you join forces with people at home or online, you have a better chance of staying motivated. Best of all, you don't have to make big changes all at once. Small steps can get you where you want to go. Gather your friends and family and make a commitment to your heart health, together.

## Here's How to Start:

### Move more

Get *at least* 2½ hours of physical activity each week—that's just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. In addition, do muscle strengthening exercises at least 2 days a week. Can't carve out a lot of time in your day? Don't chuck your goal, chunk it! Try 5, 10, or 15 minutes a few times a day. Some physical activity is better than none.

#### Be active, together:

Get creative. Invite a colleague to keep you on track. Text each other a reminder to go for a walk or take an online exercise class together. Grab your kids and do jumping jacks, shoot some hoops, or dance. People with friends or family who support their efforts to be physically active are more likely to be successful, studies show.



### Eat healthy foods

A healthy diet that is low in sodium and saturated fat is key to heart disease prevention. Try the highly rated Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan. It recommends:

- Eating vegetables, fruits, and whole grains
- Eating fish, poultry, beans, nuts, vegetable oils, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products
- Limiting foods that are high in saturated fat and sodium
- Limiting sugar and other sweeteners.

Find heart-healthy DASH recipes at:  
[healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://healthyeating.nhlbi.nih.gov)

#### Eat healthy, together:

When you get fast food, ask for a salad instead of fries, and don't get the "deluxe" sandwich. Start your meal with a salad or appetizer of veggies so you'll have something healthy first. Studies suggest that we tend to eat like our friends and family. Your healthy choices may inspire those around you.



## Aim for a healthy weight

Being overweight is hard on your heart. It increases your risk of having heart disease, a stroke, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Choosing heart-healthy foods and getting regular exercise will help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

### Manage weight, together:

A study of one popular weight loss program showed that participants who were the most connected with others in the program's online community lost the most weight. Join an online weight loss program with a buddy, or sign "social support" agreements with three family members or friends. Be sure your agreement includes ways to reduce stress, which affects energy and hunger and, if chronic, can make your body store more fat.



## Reduce stress and improve sleep

Stress can contribute to high blood pressure and other heart risks.

Not getting enough sleep or regularly getting poor quality sleep increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions. Aim for 7–8 hours of sleep a night.

### Manage sleep and stress, together:

Practicing meditation, being more physically active, doing relaxation therapy, and talking with someone you trust can help you cope with stress and sleep better. Find a friend or family member who shares your goals. Together, take steps to lower your stress and follow healthy sleep practices, like having a regular bedtime and not eating late at night.



## Quit smoking

The chemicals in tobacco smoke harm your heart and blood vessels in many ways. Quitting is hard, but many people have succeeded, and you can too. Set a quit date and let those close to you know about it. Ask your family and friends for support in your effort.

### Be smoke-free, together:

The websites [BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov](https://www.beTobaccoFree.hhs.gov) and [Smokefree.gov](https://www.Smokefree.gov) have many free resources, including apps and a chat line, to help you connect with others trying to quit. To keep your hands busy and be with others when you get urges, consider taking an online class for an activity like sewing, knitting, woodworking, art, or music.



## Know your numbers

Meet your heart health goals by keeping track of how much you exercise, your blood pressure, your cholesterol numbers—all of which can impact your heart health—and tell your doctor how you're doing.

### Track your heart health stats, together:

Keeping a log of your blood pressure, weight goals, physical activity, and if you have diabetes, your blood sugars, will help you stay on a heart-healthy track. Ask your friends or family to join you in the effort. Check out NHLBI's **Healthy Blood Pressure for Healthy Hearts: Tracking Your Numbers worksheet and other materials** at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hypertension)

