

Taking Care of Our Hearts Together

in the American Indian/
Alaska Native Community



Heart disease is largely preventable, yet many people will likely develop coronary heart disease, the most common form of it. The disease affects millions, but some groups, such as American Indians and Alaska Natives, are affected more than others. Together, we can change that. Make heart disease prevention a priority for yourself and those in your community!

Why are American Indians/Alaska Natives at higher risk of heart disease?

As a group, American Indians/Alaska Natives have high rates of certain risk factors for heart disease, such as diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), and commercial tobacco use. Knowing your risk factors is key to understanding how to prevent heart disease and build a strong and healthy heart.

What steps can you take to improve your heart health – individually and as a community?

Social support can help a lot. Studies have shown that having positive, close relationships and feeling connected to others has health benefits. In American Indian/Alaska Native communities, key sources of connection often come from extended family networks, tribal elders, community ceremonies and traditions, spiritual practices, and tribal organizations. There are many things you can do with community members or in your daily life alone that can improve heart health.

Stay Active

Aim for 150 minutes of moderate physical activity weekly. Break it up into manageable chunks, like 30 minutes 5 days a week, or 10 minutes three times a day, 5 days a week. Take a walk after a meal, play a sport, join a dance class, or do anything you enjoy that gets your heart pumping.

Manage Stress

Learning how to de-stress will make you happier and your heart healthier. Find ways to relax like watching a movie or practicing yoga to reduce your stress levels. Be sure to get enough good quality sleep.

Risk Factors

American Indian/Alaska Native adults are **1.5 times more** likely than non-Hispanic White adults to be diagnosed with **diabetes**.



About **34% of American Indian/Alaska Native adults have hypertension**, and rates are higher among those living in rural areas and small or medium metropolitan areas.



Commercial tobacco use rates among American Indians/Alaska Natives vary by region:



40% The Northern plains have the highest rates.

20% The Southwest has the lowest rates.

American Indians/Alaska Natives are also **20% more likely** to be **current cigarette smokers** than non-Hispanic White adults.

Control Your Cholesterol

Have your cholesterol checked by a healthcare provider. Use the [My Heart Health Tracker](#) to keep track of your numbers. Talk to your provider about any changes in your lifestyle that can help or medications you might need.



Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet

Whether it's a family gathering or your daily meals, fill your plate with vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products. Limit foods that are high in saturated fat, sugars, and salt and sodium, too.



Stop Commercial Tobacco Use

Take steps to quit [commercial tobacco use](#). Make a list of the reasons you want to quit, select a quit date, and write a contract that outlines your plan for quitting. Ask a healthcare provider for help.



Track Your Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease. Have your blood pressure checked at each healthcare provider visit and track your numbers using a [blood pressure log](#). Ask if you should self-measure your blood pressure at home.



Manage Your Diabetes

Having diabetes increases the risk of heart disease. Learn how to [control the ABCs of diabetes](#) and note your progress for each one.

Eating heart healthy can be easy when you follow the [DASH eating plan](#), a flexible and balanced plan that helps you eat heart-healthy for life. Try this DASH-friendly [Alaska Salmon Salad recipe](#). For more healthy recipes, visit [NHLBI's Heart-Healthy Eating](#) webpage.



Alaska Salmon Salad

- 1 fillet (14 oz)** salmon
- 1/3 cup** chopped green onion
- 1/3 cup** chopped celery
- 1/3 cup** nonfat plain yogurt
- 1 tablespoon** lemon juice
- Ground black pepper, to taste**

- 1.** Bake fresh, unsalted salmon (until it flakes easily with a fork in the thickest part). Flake, place in a bowl, and chill.
- 2.** After salmon has chilled, stir in the remaining ingredients.
- 3.** Season with black pepper to taste.
- 4.** Serve as a side dish or salad, or spread on pilot bread or unsalted crackers.

What are some ways to support each other as you take care of your hearts together?

Join forces with people at home, at work, in your neighborhood, or online to stay motivated and commit to being heart-healthy together. Have conversations about heart health, and encourage each other to know healthy ranges for blood pressure and cholesterol levels and what your numbers are. Set goals for maintaining a healthy weight and share tips and resources to incorporate heart-healthy behaviors into your daily routines. Help your community stay physically active by planning and participating in group activities that promote fitness at schools, community gatherings, and parks. By focusing on heart health as a community, we can motivate and encourage one another to prevent heart disease.

For more information on heart disease prevention, visit www.hearttruth.gov.