

A Healthy Heart: Care Instructions

Overview



Coronary artery disease, also called heart disease, occurs when a substance called plaque builds up in the vessels that supply oxygen-rich blood to your heart muscle. This can narrow the blood vessels and reduce blood flow. A heart attack happens when blood flow is completely blocked. A high-fat diet, smoking, and other factors increase the risk of heart disease.

Your doctor has found that you have a chance of having heart disease. A heart-healthy lifestyle can help keep your heart healthy and prevent heart disease. This lifestyle includes eating healthy, being active, staying at a weight that's healthy for you, and not smoking, vaping, or using other tobacco or nicotine products. It also includes taking medicines as directed, managing other health conditions, and trying to get a healthy amount of sleep.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and contact your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Diet

- Use less salt when you cook and eat. This helps lower your blood pressure. Taste food before salting. Add only a little salt when you think you need it. With time, your taste buds will adjust to less salt.

- Eat fewer snack items, fast foods, canned soups, and other high-salt, high-fat, processed foods.
- Read food labels and try to avoid saturated and trans fats. They increase your risk of heart disease by raising cholesterol levels.
- Limit the amount of solid fat—butter, margarine, and shortening—you eat. Use olive, peanut, or canola oil when you cook. Bake, broil, and steam foods instead of frying them.
- Eat a variety of fruit and vegetables every day. Dark green, deep orange, red, or yellow fruits and vegetables are especially good for you. Examples include spinach, carrots, peaches, and berries.
- Foods high in fiber can reduce your cholesterol and provide important vitamins and minerals. High-fiber foods include whole-grain cereals and breads, oatmeal, beans, brown rice, citrus fruits, and apples.
- Eat lean proteins. Heart-healthy proteins include seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans, peas, nuts, seeds, and soy products.
- Limit drinks and foods with added sugar. These include candy, desserts, and soda pop.

Heart-healthy lifestyle

- If your doctor recommends it, get more exercise. For many people, walking is a good choice. Or you may want to swim, bike, or do other activities. Bit by bit, increase the time you're active every day. Try for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.
- If you smoke, vape, or use other tobacco or nicotine products, try to quit. If you can't quit, cut back as much as you can. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about quit programs and medicines. Quitting is one of the most important things you can do to protect your heart. Also avoid secondhand smoke and the aerosol mist from vaping.
- Stay at a weight that's healthy for you. Talk to your doctor if you need help losing weight.
- Try to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.
- Limit alcohol to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women. Too much alcohol can cause health problems.
- Manage other health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. If you think you may have a problem with alcohol or drug use, talk to your doctor.

Medicines

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. Contact your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 if you have symptoms of a heart attack. These may include:

- Chest pain or pressure, or a strange feeling in the chest.
- Sweating.
- Shortness of breath.
- Pain, pressure, or a strange feeling in the back, neck, jaw, or upper belly or in one or both shoulders or arms.
- Lightheadedness or sudden weakness.
- A fast or irregular heartbeat.

After you call **911**, the operator may tell you to chew 1 adult-strength or 2 to 4 low-dose aspirin. Wait for an ambulance. Do not try to drive yourself.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if you have any problems.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://kp.org/health>

Enter **F075** in the search box to learn more about "**A Healthy Heart: Care Instructions**".

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