

**February is 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 at meeting our health goals when we join forces with others. NHLBI launched the #OurHearts movement to inspire us to protect and strengthen our hearts with the support of others.

Here are some facts, how-to tips, and resources to inspire you to join with others to improve your heart health. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. About 90 percent of middle-aged people and more than 74 percent of young adults have one or more risk factors for heart disease, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, or being a smoker or overweight. Having multiple risk factors increases your risk for heart disease.

**Why Connecting is Good for Your Heart.** Feeling connected with others and having positive, close relationships benefit our overall health, including our blood pressure and weight. While COVID-19 is keeping us physically distant, phone calls, face-time, texts to check in on family and friends may help!

Follow these heart healthy lifestyle tips and share them with your friends, family, coworkers, and others in your community and you will all be heart healthier for it:

- Be more physically active.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a nutritious diet.
- Quit smoking.
- Reduce your stress.
- Get enough quality sleep.
- Track your heart health stats.

You don't have to make big changes all at once. Small steps will get you where you want to go. Aim for 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 2 days a week. Can't carve out a lot of time in your day? Don't chuck your goal, chunk it! Try 10 or 15 minutes a few times a day.

### **Aim for a healthy weight**

Find someone in your friend group, at work, or in your family who also wants to reach or maintain a healthy weight. (If you're overweight, even a small weight loss of 5–10 percent helps your health.) Check in with them regularly to stay motivated.

### **Eat heart healthy**

We tend to eat like our friends and family, so ask others close to you to join in your effort to eat healthier. Together, try NHLBI's free [Approaches to Stop Hypertension \(DASH\)](#) eating plan. Research shows that, compared to a typical American diet, it lowers high blood pressure and improves blood cholesterol levels.

### **Quit smoking**

To help you quit, ask others for support or join a support group. Research shows 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 [BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov](http://BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov) and [Smokefree.gov](http://Smokefree.gov). If you need extra motivation to quit, consider those around

you: Breathing 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.

### **Manage stress**

Reducing stress helps your heart health. Join with a friend or family member to do a relaxing activity every day, like walking, yoga, or meditation, or participate in a stress management program together. Physical activity also helps reduce stress. Talk to a qualified mental health provider or someone else you trust.

### **Improve sleep**

Sleeping 7–8 hours a night helps to improve heart health. De-stressing will help you sleep, as does getting a 30-minute daily dose of sunlight. Take a walk instead of a late afternoon nap! Family members and friends: remind each other to turn off the screen and stick to a regular bedtime. Instead of watching TV before bed, relax by listening to music, reading, or taking a bath.

### **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.

For more information, recipes, eating plans, helpful worksheets and more, please visit National Heart, Lung and Blood Institutes website at <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>