
Healthy choices

The heart of good health

Should you eat eggs? What about cheese? Can you have a glass of wine? How much exercise should you get? You make hundreds of small choices every day, but do they help or hurt your heart?

Changing your choices can be challenging, but it doesn't have to be. Follow these guidelines to keep your heart healthy — or help it heal. If you need a little help, talk to your care team or try our online programs.

Make heart-healthy choices

To take care of your heart, take care of the whole you. The same healthy basics that reduce your risk of other diseases also help to keep your heart strong and help it to heal if you have heart disease.

Eat right for your heart. Heart-healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, healthy proteins (such as fish, beans, chicken, nuts and low-fat dairy), and whole grains will help keep your heart and blood vessels in good shape. Use our Nourish program to create your own personalized eating plan — and visit our farmers markets for fresh inspiration.

If you drink alcohol, drink it in moderation. Drinking too much alcohol can raise your total cholesterol levels and your blood pressure. Limit alcohol to no more than 1 drink a day for women or 2 drinks a day for men. A drink equals:

- 12 ounces of beer
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1 ounce of liquor

Learn ways to cut back or talk to your doctor for additional help.

Get your heart pumping. We recommend that you do 150 minutes of exercise in a week or at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days. If you can't do all 30 minutes at once, do 10 minutes at a time.



Brisk walking, swimming, or cycling are especially good for the heart, but choose any activity you enjoy. Start at your comfort level, and build up gradually. If you have heart disease, check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

Maintain a healthy weight. Lowering your weight by just 10 percent can make a significant difference in reducing your heart disease risk. If you need to lose weight, learn ways to change your eating habits and be more physically active.

De-stress your life. Stress, anger, anxiety, and depression may keep your blood pressure high and increase your risk for heart attack, stroke, and other illnesses. Use Relax, an online program to create your own

personalized relaxation and stress-management plan.

If you smoke, now's the time to quit. We have many resources to help you take this critical step to improve your health.

Partner with your care team

Sometimes exercise and changes in your diet aren't enough to prevent or manage heart disease, especially if you have:

- high blood pressure
- unhealthy cholesterol or triglyceride levels
- uncontrolled diabetes

Your doctor and care team will put together a treatment plan that may include medications, healthy lifestyle changes, and classes or online programs. You may need to take extra care to stay healthy:



Watch your cholesterol level. Cholesterol is an important chemical that your body needs, but too much can block your blood vessels and cause chest pain, a heart attack, or a stroke. Your care team can help you reduce your total and LDL (bad) cholesterol and raise your HDL (good) cholesterol through a healthy diet, exercise, and medication (if needed). While statin medications lower LDL (bad cholesterol), they may also prevent heart attacks and stroke in people with low cholesterol who are still at risk for heart attack or stroke because of other reasons like smoking or diabetes.

Keep your triglyceride levels low. Triglycerides are a type of fat found in your body and many foods. Having a fasting level of 150 mg/dL of triglycerides or greater in your blood may increase your risk of heart disease, especially when you have a high level of the bad cholesterol (LDL) or a low level of the good cholesterol (HDL).

Reduce high blood pressure. High blood pressure (hypertension) is a major cause of heart disease — and you may not experience any symptoms. The only way to tell whether you have high blood pressure is to have it measured. This is done routinely during most doctor visits.

If you do have high blood pressure:

- monitor it at home with a blood pressure cuff
- take your medications as prescribed, even if your blood pressure falls within a normal range (120/80 and lower)

If you have diabetes, manage it. People with diabetes have high rates of heart disease, so it's extremely important that you work with your doctor and care team to manage it.

Take your medications faithfully. Whether you're taking aspirin daily on the advice of your doctor or other heart medications, take them as prescribed.

For our Northern California members

The EMMI® online program can help you understand and take control of your heart health. Whether you've just been diagnosed or need a refresher, visit the EMMI® website to get started:

Northern California

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