

## Making Changes

Making lifestyle changes can go a long way in helping to reduce your risk for heart disease. Here are some tips to help get you started on the "Big Four":

1. Eat a nutritious diet.
2. Engage in regular physical activity.
3. Maintain a healthy weight.
4. Stop smoking.

### Eat a Nutritious Diet

Diet is a factor in weight management as well as managing cholesterol and other blood lipid levels, blood pressure, and diabetes. Make sure you are eating a heart-healthy diet. "Meet with a registered dietitian to plan a diet that meets these goals:



- Include at least 14 grams of fiber daily for every 1,000 calories consumed. Foods high in fiber may help lower blood cholesterol. Oat bran, oatmeal, whole-grain breads and cereals, dried beans and peas (such as kidney beans, pinto beans, and black-eyed peas), fruits, and vegetables are all good sources of fiber. Increase the amount of fiber in your diet gradually to avoid digestive problems.
- Cut down on saturated fat. It raises your blood cholesterol level. Saturated fat is found in meats, poultry skin, butter, dairy products with fat, shortening, lard, and tropical oils such as palm and coconut oil. Your dietitian can figure out how many grams of saturated fat should be your daily maximum amount. (You can use the Figuring Out Fat chart to guide you. You should be keeping fat calories to 30 percent or less of your total calories.<sup>1)</sup>)
- Keep the cholesterol in your diet to less than 300 milligrams a day. Cholesterol is found in meat, dairy products, and eggs.

- Keep the amount of trans fat in your diet to a minimum. It's a type of fat in foods that raises blood cholesterol. Limit your intake of crackers, cookies, snack foods, commercially prepared baked goods, cake mixes, microwave popcorn, fried foods, salad dressings, and other foods made with partially hydrogenated oil. In addition, some kinds of vegetable shortening and margarines have trans fat. Check for trans fat in the Nutrition Facts section on the food package."<sup>2)</sup>

### Figuring Out Fat

The table below from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute shows the maximum amount of saturated fat you should eat, depending on how many calories you take in each day. If you have high blood cholesterol or heart disease, the amount of saturated fat will be different, so discuss this with your doctor and consider using the [Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes \(TLC\)](#) diet. If you do not have high blood cholesterol or heart disease, the saturated fat in your diet should be less than 10 percent of your daily calories, and total fat should be 20 to 35 percent of calories. Check the Nutrition Facts panel on food labels to find out the number of fat grams – both saturated and total – in each serving.

Total Calorie Intake	Limit on Saturated Fat Intake
1,200	13 g or less
1,600	18 g or less
2,000*	20 g or less
2,200	24 g or less
2,500*	25 g or less
2,800	31 g or less

\*Percent Daily Values on Nutrition Facts labels are based on a 2,000-calorie diet. Values for 2,000 and 2,500 calories are rounded to the nearest 5 gram to be consistent with the Nutrition Facts label.

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2007). The healthy heart handbook for women [online]. Retrieved January 5, 2010. From [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/hhw/hdbk\\_wmn.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/hhw/hdbk_wmn.pdf).

- In general, “eat more foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber. These include fruits and vegetables, whole grains and grain products, beans and peas, fat-free and low-fat milk products, lean meats and poultry without skin, fatty fish, and nuts and seeds in limited amounts.”<sup>3</sup>

Consider using the [Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes](#) (TLC) diet to decrease saturated and trans fats to lower blood cholesterol levels or the [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension](#) (DASH) diet to reduce blood pressure. Even if you don’t have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, these eating plans are a good choice for anyone wanting a heart-healthy eating plan.

### Engage in Regular Physical Activity

Physical activity can help control blood cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure.<sup>4,5</sup> “An inactive lifestyle is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. Regular, moderate-to-vigorous physical activity helps prevent heart and blood vessel disease. The more vigorous the activity, the greater your benefits. However, even moderate-intensity activities help if done regularly and long term.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, “a recent study showed that moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, helps people lose weight as effectively as more vigorous exercise.”<sup>6</sup> (Note: A simple target for moderate-intensity physical activity is walking one mile in 15 minutes twice a day, working your way up to 2 miles in 30 minutes once a day.<sup>7</sup> If you have been inactive, take this slowly, working your way to a 15-minute mile. Consult your doctor about the best exercise prescription for you.)

“Even if you have no other risk factors, being physically inactive greatly boosts your chances of developing heart-related problems. But nearly 40 percent of Americans do no spare-time physical activity at all. Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. This includes brisk walking, light weightlifting, or even housecleaning or gardening. If you need to, divide the 30 minutes into shorter periods of at least 10 minutes each.”<sup>8</sup> “If you’re trying to manage your weight and prevent gradual, unhealthy weight gain, try to boost that level [and make a goal of] approximately 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity on most days of the week.”<sup>6</sup>

### Maintain a Healthy Weight

“When it comes to weight loss, there are no quick fixes. Successful, lasting weight loss requires a change

of lifestyle, not a brief effort to drop pounds quickly. Otherwise, you will probably regain the weight. Aim to lose ½ pound to 2 pounds per week – no more.”<sup>6</sup> “If you have a lot of weight to lose, ask your doctor, a registered dietitian, or a qualified nutritionist to help you develop a sensible plan for gradual weight loss.”<sup>6</sup>



“To take off pounds and keep them off, you will need to make changes in both your eating and physical activity habits. Weight control is a question of balance. You take in calories from the food you eat. You burn off calories by physical activity. Cutting down on calories, especially calories from fat, is key to losing weight.”<sup>6</sup> “To lose weight, most overweight people will need to cut 500 to 1,000 calories per day from their current diet.”<sup>6</sup>

“Combining this change in diet with a regular physical activity program, such as walking or swimming, will help you both shed pounds and stay trim for the long term.”<sup>6</sup> If you are overweight or obese, don’t become discouraged. A loss of just 5-10 percent of your current weight can lower heart disease risk.<sup>9</sup> Losing even 10 pounds can help lower your heart disease risk.<sup>4</sup>

### Stop Smoking

“Quitting smoking immediately reduces your risk of heart disease, cancer, and other serious disorders, with the benefits increasing over time.... Within several years, it will approach the heart disease risk of someone who has never smoked.... If you already have heart disease, giving up cigarettes will lower your risk of heart attack.”<sup>6</sup>

If you have tried to quit before and been unsuccessful, try again. Ask your doctor about the latest “quit-smoking” aids. “Some of these medications contain very small amounts of nicotine, which can help to lessen the urge to smoke. They include nicotine gum (available over the counter), the nicotine patch

(available over the counter and by prescription), a nicotine inhaler (by prescription only), and a nicotine nasal spray (by prescription only). Another quitting aid is bupropion sustained release (Zyban™), a medicine that contains no nicotine but reduces the craving for cigarettes. Varenicline tartrate (Chantix™) eases withdrawal symptoms and blocks the effects of nicotine if you slip and start smoking again. Both are available only by prescription. While all of these medications can help people to stop smoking, they are not safe for everyone. Talk with your doctor about whether you should try any of these aids.”<sup>6</sup>

### Sources

1. American Academy of Family Physicians (2009). Heart Disease and Heart Attacks: What Women Need to Know [online]. Retrieved January 29, 2010. From <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/heartdisease/risk/287.printerview.html>.
2. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (2005). Diabetes, heart disease, and stroke [online]. Retrieved December 18, 2009. From <http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/stroke/#prevent>.
3. American Heart Association (2004). What are high blood cholesterol and triglycerides? [online]. Retrieved January 5, 2010. From <http://www.americanheart.org/downloadable/heart/119696589412413%20WhatareHBCholandTrig%209%2007.pdf>.
4. American Heart Association (2009). Risk factors you can change [online]. Retrieved January 26, 2010. From <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=494#obesity>.
5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2008). Cardiovascular disease – primary prevention [online]. Retrieved January 8, 2010. From [http://www.guideline.gov/summary/summary.aspx?doc\\_id=14258](http://www.guideline.gov/summary/summary.aspx?doc_id=14258).
6. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2007). The healthy heart handbook for women [online]. Retrieved January 5, 2010. From [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/hhw/hdbk\\_wmn.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/hhw/hdbk_wmn.pdf).
7. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2008). Cardiovascular disease – primary prevention [online]. Retrieved January 8, 2010. From [http://www.guideline.gov/summary/summary.aspx?doc\\_id=14258](http://www.guideline.gov/summary/summary.aspx?doc_id=14258).
8. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2006). In brief: Your guide to a healthy heart [online]. Retrieved January 5, 2010. From [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/your\\_guide/healthyheart\\_fs.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/other/your_guide/healthyheart_fs.pdf).
9. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2010). How to prevent and control heart disease risk factors [online]. Retrieved January 28, 2010. From [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/hd/hd\\_prevention.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/hd/hd_prevention.html).