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Physical activity and healthy eating habits can help prevent and treat heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis. A healthy lifestyle can also help control other major heart disease risk factors such as high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. Physical activity and a well-balanced diet are two important factors in your cardiovascular health.

## Nutrition

What you eat is important. It may help you prevent a heart attack or stroke. Healthy food habits can help you reduce three risk factors for heart attack and stroke — high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure and excess body weight.

According to the American Heart Association, you should follow these dietary guidelines:

- Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables. Choose five or more servings per day.
- Eat a variety of grain products, including whole grains. Choose six or more servings per day.
- Eat fish at least twice a week, particularly fatty fish.
- Include fat-free and low-fat milk products, legumes (beans), skinless poultry and lean meats.
- Choose fats and oils with two grams or less saturated fat per tablespoon.
- Balance the number of calories you eat with the number of calories you use each day to maintain your best weight.
- Limit your intake of foods high in calories or low in nutrition.
- Limit foods high in saturated fat, trans fat and/or cholesterol.
- If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation.

## Exercise

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for heart disease. Besides helping you control your weight, exercising may help you avoid cigarette smoking, control your blood pressure and raise your HDL (“good”) cholesterol level. Along with cardiovascular benefits, regular physical activity can help you look and feel better.

For most healthy people, the American Heart Association suggests activities such as brisk walking, hiking, jogging, bicycling, swimming, roller skating, jumping rope and other active sports or games. Try to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

Medical studies show that even moderate-intensity activities, when performed daily, can have long-term health benefits. Examples include pleasure walking, gardening, yard work, dancing and prescribed home exercise. Even taking the stairs more often or parking your car further away can help increase your activity.