Improving Cardiovascular Health
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Why is Cardiovascular Health Important?

Having good cardiovascular health can help you feel well and prevent disease. This is a step-by-step guide to help you learn which lifestyle choices can lower your risk for cardiovascular disease, and support your cardiovascular health.

How to Use This Guide

- Read each section carefully and write notes or questions that you have
- Take your questions with you when you see your doctor or nurse
- Keep the guide handy and refer to it often
- Share the information with family and friends
- Use the forms in Your Health Toolkit on pages 45-51 to set goals and keep track of your health

You will find the meaning of the words in bold black text on pages 41–42.

For More Information

For more information about cardiovascular health, visit our website at: www.mainehealth.org/services/heart-circulatory-health/coronary-artery-disease.
What is Cardiovascular Health?
Being at a Healthy Weight

Carrying extra weight increases your chance of getting many diseases including heart disease, peripheral vascular disease (PVD), stroke, liver disease, as well as certain cancers.

Losing weight can make you healthier in many ways. Losing just a little weight can also make a difference in the way you feel.

**Losing weight can help you:**
- Have more energy
- Lower your cholesterol
- Lower your blood pressure
- Put less strain on your joints, especially your knees and hips
- Lower your chance of dying suddenly from heart disease or stroke
- Prevent Type 2 diabetes
- Improve blood sugar levels

If you need to lose weight, you will need to eat fewer calories than you burn. Your body burns calories by being physically active. If you are at a healthy weight, it is important to balance the calories you eat and the calories you burn so that you can maintain it.
Are You at a Healthy Weight?

One way to tell if you are at a healthy weight is to figure out your body mass index (BMI). BMI is a measure of your weight compared to your height. Your healthcare team may use it to help figure out your risk for health problems.

Find your BMI by using the chart on page 49. You can also ask your doctor or nurse to help you figure out your BMI at your next appointment.

- BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is healthy weight
- BMI between 25 and 29.9 is overweight
- BMI over 30 is obese

Waist Circumference

This is another way to figure out your risk for heart problems. It can be done by you or by your doctor or nurse.

To measure your waist, stand and place a tape measure around your middle, just above your hip bones. Measure your waist just after you breathe out.

Healthy Waist Circumference

- If you are a woman, a healthy waist circumference is less than 35 inches
- If you are a man, a healthy waist circumference is less than 40 inches

A large waist circumference can lead to higher triglyceride levels and can increase your risk for diabetes.
Choosing Healthy Foods

Chose These Foods to Help You Stay Healthy and Lose Weight

■ A variety of grains daily. Half of your daily grains should come from whole grains. Examples include:
  • Whole-wheat bread
  • Oatmeal
  • Whole cornmeal
  • Brown rice
  • Whole grain pasta
  • Bulgur (cracked wheat)
■ A variety of fruits and vegetables daily
■ Foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol
■ Foods and beverages that are low in added sugar
■ Foods with little or no salt
■ Fish twice a week (at least)
■ Vegetable-based foods
■ Foods that are in their natural state, not processed in a factory

Learn More
Healthy eating and portions
Go to www.choosemyplate.gov
Taking Action

The Goal: Get to and keep a healthy weight.

What You Can Do

- **Know your numbers**
  Measure your BMI and your waist circumference.
  - You can use the information to decide if you need to lose weight
  - Talk with your healthcare team about whether you should lose weight

- **Put a plan together**
  To make a plan that works well for you:
  - Talk with your healthcare team or a registered dietitian (R.D.)
  - Check with your insurance plan to see if nutrition counseling is covered
  - Use the Weight Tracker on page 48 to help you with your weight loss

- **Keep track of your progress**
  Use the Physical Activity Tracker on page 47 to keep track of your weekly activity

**Ask Your Healthcare Team**

- What is my body mass index (BMI) and my waist circumference?
- What do these numbers mean for me?
- Do I need to lose weight to improve my health?
- What is a heart healthy eating plan for me?
- Should I see a registered dietitian to learn more about healthy eating?

**Move It and Lose It!**

If you are trying to lose weight, you will be more successful if you do more than 30 minutes of activity most days of the week.
Being Physically Active

Being active for 30 minutes or more on most days of the week helps to improve your health and lower your chance of getting cardiovascular disease. If you are active, you are less likely to get high blood pressure or diabetes and more likely to maintain a healthy weight. People who are active need fewer visits to the doctor, go to the hospital less and use less medicine than people who are not active.

Regular exercise can help you:
- Relax
- Feel better about yourself
- Get to a healthy weight
- Raise “good” HDL cholesterol
- Get strong
- Maintain balance and flexibility

Talk to your doctor before starting to exercise. Find out what is best for you, and decide what fits your lifestyle. Heavy exercise without being physically fit can cause a heart problem.

Here are Some Things You Might Try
- Walking
- Swimming
- Biking
- Gardening
- Climbing stairs
- Raking leaves
- Dancing
Taking Action

The Goal: Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. Your activity goal depends on your health. Before you get started, talk with your healthcare team about the right goal for you.

What You Can Do

- **Start slow**
  Start with what you can do, and build from there

- **Choose what you like to do**
  Some people may join a gym. For other people, brisk walking and household chores (car washing, gardening, raking leaves) work best.

- **Break it up**
  If you need to, break your activity up throughout the day. For example, try going for a 10-minute walk in the morning, at lunch and again after dinner.

- **Exercise most days**
  Some exercise most days is better than a lot of exercise only once a week
  - **Warm up**
    Take at least 5 minutes at a slower pace to warm up before you exercise
  - **Cool down**
    At the end of exercise, take 5–10 minutes to slow down and stretch the muscles you used during exercise

Ask Your Healthcare Team

- How much physical activity do I need to do?
- What kinds of activities are helpful or right for me?

Important!

- If you have had a heart attack or other cardiac event, go to a cardiac rehabilitation program in your local community
- If you have peripheral vascular disease (PVD), walking is very important. This helps you keep enough blood flowing to your legs. You may not be able to walk very far at first. That’s OK. If you get leg pain, rest until it goes away and then try walking some more. Cardiac rehab programs can help get you started.
Managing Stress

It’s normal to feel stress sometimes. But, too much stress can raise your chance of having a heart attack. Learn how to deal with your stress so you feel better and stay healthier.

What Happens When You Are Stressed?
- Heart rate speeds up
- Blood pressure goes up
- Muscles tense
- Breathing speeds up
- Sweating begins
- Blood flow to organs and limbs goes down

Healthy and Unhealthy Stress
Stress is not always a bad thing. In some cases, stress can help the body stay alert and react under pressure.

Some examples of healthy stress include:
- Taking an important test or exam
- Working under a deadline
- Playing a sport and having to react quickly
- Avoiding a car accident when another driver pulls out in front of you or suddenly slams on the brakes
- Reacting quickly in a dangerous situation like a violent storm or a robbery

Unhealthy stress can be bad for your heart.

Some examples of unhealthy stress are:
- Too much worry, fear and restlessness
- A lot of anxiety when you are trying to relax or rest
- Stress that makes it harder to concentrate
- Stress that keeps you from sleeping well
- Stress that hurts your performance at work
- Headaches, backaches, stomachaches and other physical problems that come with stress
Taking Action

The Goal: Manage your stress and increase healthy habits.

What You Can Do
There are many ways to deal with your stress.

Try some of these tips, or make a plan that works for you:

- Be active
- Try yoga or meditation
- Get plenty of sleep
- Eat healthy foods
- Ask for help when things are bothering you. Talk to a therapist or a religious leader.
- Share your feelings and concerns with family, friends, your doctor or nurse
- Check in your community for classes on stress management, relaxation or meditation
Avoiding Tobacco and Secondhand Smoke

Why Should I Quit?

■ Quitting tobacco is the #1 thing you can do to improve your health
■ If you smoke, you are up to six times more likely to have a heart attack than non-tobacco users
■ Tobacco use puts stress on your heart. The chemicals in cigarettes narrow the coronary arteries, raise blood pressure and make the heart work harder.
■ Tobacco use shortens your life
■ Tobacco use raises your risk of stroke and peripheral vascular disease

The Benefits

Quitting can save your life. Even if you already have heart disease, you can gain years of life by quitting. It is never too late to quit.

■ Within 20 minutes of quitting:
  • Blood pressure and pulse rate drop
  • Body temperature of hands and feet increases
■ In 48 hours:
  • Ability to smell and taste improves
■ In 2 weeks:
  • Circulation improves
■ In 1 year:
  • Risk of coronary artery disease is half that of a smoker
■ In 5–15 years:
  • Risk of stroke is that of a nonsmoker
■ In 15 years:
  • Risk of coronary artery disease is that of a nonsmoker

Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS)

■ ENDS include electronic cigarettes (E-cigarettes) and vape products
■ E-cigarettes are not regulated, so there is no way to know how much nicotine is in them or how the health of users will be affected in the long term
■ ENDS are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as a way to quit tobacco use

Learn More

Maine Tobacco Helpline
visit www.thequitlink.com
or call: 1-800-207-1230
What is Secondhand Smoke?
Secondhand smoke is the smoke that is breathed out by a smoker from a burning cigarette, cigar or pipe.

Secondhand smoke hurts anyone who breathes it.
- The risk of getting heart disease and lung cancer goes up
- For nonsmokers, the immediate harmful effects can increase the risk of [heart attack](#). People who already have heart disease are at especially high risk.
- Secondhand marijuana smoke contains many of the same cancer-causing substances and toxic chemicals as secondhand tobacco smoke

How to Avoid Secondhand Smoke
With planning, you can stay away from secondhand smoke. Start with these simple steps:
- **Don’t allow smoking in your home**
  If you live with a smoker, ask him or her to smoke outside. Ask guests, too.
- **Ask people not to smoke in your car**
- **Make sure that smoking rules are followed at your job**
- **Choose smoke-free child and elder care facilities**
  Tell your child’s or aging loved one’s caregivers not to smoke around them
- **Avoid places where smoking is allowed**

If you have a partner or other loved one who smokes, offer support and encouragement to stop smoking. The entire family will benefit if they quit.

Smoke is Smoke!
Both tobacco and marijuana smoke have the same negative effect on your blood vessels.
Taking Action

The Goal: Be tobacco-free. This means no use (smoking or chewing) of tobacco products and no exposure to secondhand smoke.

What You Can Do
Quit tobacco. Follow these steps to success.

- **Get Ready**
  - Write down all your reasons for quitting
  - Tell friends and family about your plan to quit so they can support you
  - Pay attention to when and why you smoke
  - Try new ways to relax
  - Take up a hobby to keep your hands busy

- **Get Set**
  - Make an appointment with your healthcare team to ask about medicines to help you quit. Nicotine patches and nicotine gum are available without a prescription. If you decide to take medicine, be sure to follow directions carefully.
  - Call the Maine Tobacco HelpLine at 1-800-207-1230 or visit www.thequitlink.com. It’s free! They can tell you about using a nicotine patch, lozenge or gum. If you qualify, you may get help with paying for these items.

- **Quit**
  - Go to places where you know people don’t smoke
  - Remind yourself of all the good reasons why you are quitting
  - Stay positive. You can make it!
  - Stay healthy and smoke-free

**Important!**
If you don’t succeed at first, try again. You learn something new every time you quit. It takes some people many times to be successful.

**Ask Your Healthcare Team**
- What can you do to help me quit using tobacco?
Having a Healthy Blood Pressure

**High blood pressure** is often called the silent killer because you don’t feel any symptoms if you have it. Because of this, many people don’t pay attention to their blood pressure. Don’t make this mistake! Get your blood pressure checked.

**Understanding the Numbers**

- **Systolic blood pressure** is the pressure in the **arteries** when the heart beats
- **Diastolic blood pressure** is the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats, or when the heart is relaxed

If you have high blood pressure, you are more likely to get **cardiovascular disease**

If you already have heart disease and you also have high blood pressure, you are more likely to have a **heart attack**

Blood pressure increases with age, so it should be checked regularly

This chart explains what category your blood pressure numbers are in and what you can do to improve your numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your category</th>
<th>Top number (systolic) in mm Hg</th>
<th>Bottom number (diastolic) in mm Hg</th>
<th>What to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal blood pressure</td>
<td>Below 120</td>
<td>and Below 80</td>
<td><strong>Good job! Keep making healthy choices to keep your blood pressure low.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-high blood pressure</td>
<td>120-139</td>
<td>or 80-89</td>
<td><strong>Your blood pressure could be a problem. Eat better and be more active. Lose weight if you need to.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
<td>140 or higher</td>
<td>or 90 or higher</td>
<td><strong>Eat better and be more active. Lose weight if you need to.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking Action

What You Can Do

- **Know your numbers**
  Have your blood pressure checked regularly. Keep a log to share with your healthcare team. You can keep track of your numbers by using the Checkup Tracker on page 46.

- **Stay at a healthy weight**
  If you exercise and keep your weight in a healthy range, you may not have to take blood pressure medicine. If you are carrying extra weight, you can improve your blood pressure by losing as little as 10 pounds.

- **Get on a healthy eating plan**
  Talk with your doctor about seeing a registered dietitian (R.D.). They can help you learn how to take care of high blood pressure through healthy eating. The “Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension” (DASH) diet can help you lower your blood pressure.

- **Be active**
  Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. This could be walking, biking, swimming or doing yard work. Choose an activity that you like.

- **Be tobacco-free**
  Don’t smoke or use tobacco. Stay away from secondhand smoke.

- **Take medicine if you need it**
  If your blood pressure is still high even after you change what you eat and how much you exercise, your healthcare team may prescribe medicine. Follow your doctor’s directions for taking your medicines.

Learn More

- **DASH diet**
  Call: 1-207-661-7001 for a copy or go to www.dashdiet.org

- **Quitting Tobacco**
  Call the Maine Tobacco HelpLine: 1-800-207-1230

Ask

- What is my blood pressure?
- What does it mean for me, and what do I need to do about it?
- What is my blood pressure goal?
Having a Healthy Cholesterol

Extra cholesterol and fat in the blood build up in the walls of the arteries that supply blood to the heart. This buildup, called plaque, makes the arteries narrower. As a result, less blood gets through, and blood clots can form.

There are different kinds of cholesterol and fat in your blood:

- **HDL**, the “good” cholesterol, helps take cholesterol out of your blood
- **LDL**, the “bad” cholesterol, carries most of the cholesterol in the blood
- **Triglycerides** are a kind of fat carried through the bloodstream

**The Benefits**
You can protect your heart and arteries by lowering your bad cholesterol (LDL) and triglycerides. Raising your good cholesterol (HDL) is important, too.

**Cholesterol Testing**
A simple blood test is done to check your cholesterol levels. This is sometimes called a lipid profile.

**What:** This test measures total cholesterol, your “bad” cholesterol (LDL), your “good” cholesterol (HDL) and your triglycerides. You must not eat for 9 to 12 hours before the test.

**Why:** This test can tell if your cholesterol levels put you at a higher risk for cardiovascular disease.
Taking Action

The Goal: Get to the following numbers—

- **Total cholesterol:**
  - 200 mg/dL or less
- **“Good” cholesterol (HDL):**
  - At least 40 mg/dL for men and 50 mg/dL for women
  - Over 60 mg/dL is even better
- **“Bad” cholesterol (LDL):**
  - The goal for your LDL depends on your risk for heart disease. Ask your doctor what yours should be.
- **Triglycerides:**
  - 150 mg/dL or less

**Raising Your Good Cholesterol (HDL)**

You can raise your HDL with healthy habits.

- Lose weight if you are carrying extra weight
- Exercise at least 30 minutes most days of the week
- Quit smoking
- Choose healthy fats—olive oil and canola oil are better choices than butter or margarine

**Lowering Your Bad Cholesterol (LDL)**

You can lower your LDL cholesterol through what you eat.

- **Eat these foods most often:**
  - Baked, broiled or grilled fish and chicken (without the skin)
  - Skim or 1 percent milk and other low-fat dairy products
  - Egg whites
  - Fruits and vegetables
  - Beans and legumes like lentils or chickpeas
- **Don’t eat these foods very often:**
  - Whole milk and other high-fat dairy products (like ice cream or butter)
  - Egg yolks—try to only have up to three per week
  - Red meat, sausage, bacon and cold cuts
  - Organ meats like liver, kidney, sweetbreads
  - Biscuits and donuts
  - High-fat snacks (chips, candy, crackers), fried food and fast food
What Is Trans Fat?
Trans fats or trans-fatty acids are types of dietary fat that raise your bad cholesterol (LDL). The main sources of trans fats are foods made with hydrogenated oils.

If you see “hydrogenated oil” or “partially hydrogenated oil” on the food label, don’t buy it.

Don’t eat:
- Packaged baked goods – cookies, cakes, donuts, biscuits
- Fast food
- Stick margarine – use soft-tub margarine instead
- Fried food
- Microwave popcorn
- Many prepackaged foods – just look on the label for the words “hydrogenated oil”

Lowering Your Triglycerides
Eating healthy fats can lower your triglycerides.

- Eat more of these healthy fats:
  - Monounsaturated fats: olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil
  - Omega-3: fatty fish (salmon, tuna, trout, sardines) and flax seeds
  - Polyunsaturated fats: oils (safflower, sunflower), nuts and seeds

- Don’t eat much of these:
  - Sweets
  - Alcohol
  - White flour, white pasta, white potatoes, white rice

- Choose these instead:
  - Whole grain bread and pasta
  - Sweet potatoes
  - Brown rice

What You Can Do For Healthy Cholesterol

- **Try to stay at a healthy weight and get active**
  Get regular, moderate-intensity physical activity at least 30 minutes most days of the week. Moderate activities make you breathe a little harder. You should be able to talk without feeling out of breath.

- **Take your medicines**
  If you have questions about your medicines or have side effects, talk with your healthcare team

- **Quit tobacco**
  This will raise your good cholesterol (HDL)

- **Limit your alcohol use**
  No more than one drink per day for women, two drinks per day for men
Understanding Diabetes

If you have diabetes, it is important to keep your blood sugar under control. People with diabetes have at least twice the risk of cardiovascular disease as people without diabetes.

If you don’t have diabetes, it is important to make healthy choices to make sure you don’t get diabetes.

Types of Diabetes

- **Prediabetes** is when a person’s blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be called diabetes. Having prediabetes means you are more likely to get diabetes.
- **Type 1 diabetes** is when the body stops making insulin
- **Type 2 diabetes** is when your body does not make enough insulin or does not use it well. This causes a buildup of sugar in your bloodstream. This is the most common type of diabetes.

Testing for Prediabetes and Diabetes

The American Diabetes Association recommends that blood sugar testing to find prediabetes and diabetes begin at age 45. Blood sugar testing may be done sooner in adults who are carrying extra weight and have one or more of these risk factors for diabetes:

- Being physically inactive
- Having a family history of diabetes
- Women with a history of gestational diabetes
- Having high blood pressure (≥ 140/90 or on therapy for hypertension)
- Having a “good” cholesterol level (HDL) below 35 mg/dL or a triglyceride level above 250 mg/dL
- Having a history of cardiovascular disease
- Having a family background that is African American, Alaska Native, American Indian, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino or Pacific Islander
- Having AIC ≥ 5.7% on previous blood test
- Women with polycystic ovary syndrome
- Other clinical conditions related to insulin resistance (severe obesity, acanthosis nigricans)

When To Get Checked

Once you begin testing, if your blood sugar levels are in the normal range, it is ok to be checked every 3 years. If you have prediabetes, you should be checked for Type 2 diabetes every 1–2 years.
Taking Action

The Goal: Prevent or delay the onset of diabetes. If you already have diabetes, work to manage your diabetes.

What You Can Do

- Eat a healthy meal plan
- Get regular physical activity
- Get to a healthy weight. Losing 5–10 percent of your body weight can make a big difference.
- If you already have diabetes, you should also:
  - Monitor your blood sugars and talk about them regularly with your healthcare team
  - Make sure you know how and when to take any medicine you are taking. Ask your doctor or nurse if you need help.

Learn More

Prediabetes and Diabetes
Call the Learning Resource Center: 1-866-609-5183

Go to: www.mainehealth.org/services/endocrinology-diabetes

To order a copy of Understanding Diabetes call: 1-207-661-7001
Improving Cardiovascular Health – MaineHealth

Medicines may be needed to control your diabetes, high blood pressure or cholesterol. Your doctor may use medications for prevention of heart attack and stroke.

**Kinds of Medicines**

- **Blood Pressure medications may include:**
  - ACE inhibitors, beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers and diuretics
- **Cholesterol medications may include:**
  - statins
- **Diabetes medications may include:**
  - injected and oral medications
- **Heart Attack and Stroke prevention medication may include:**
  - Aspirin or other blood thinners

It is important that you and your family understand each of the medicines that you take. Talk with your doctor about any questions you have. See page 51 for a list of questions you can ask your doctor.

**Can’t Afford Your Medicines?**

There are programs that may be able to help you pay for your medicines. Talk to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.

MedAccess is a program that helps people in Maine get their prescribed medicines. MedAccess can tell you about low-cost generic medicines as well as local, state and federal programs to contact for help with paying for medicines.

MedAccess also helps people apply for free medicines that may be offered by pharmaceutical companies.

**Learn More**

**Call MedAccess: 1-877-275-1787**

and ask if you qualify

**Important!**

Always carry an updated list of your medicines with you. Include how much you take of each medicine on the list. Use the Medicine Minder on page 50.
What Else Affects Cardiovascular Health?
Alcohol Use

Drinking too much alcohol increases your risk for heart disease and stroke.

What You Can Do

- If you don’t drink alcohol, don’t start!
- You should not drink:
  - If you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant
  - If alcohol makes any of your conditions worse
  - If you are taking certain medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist.
- If you do drink, keep it moderate

What is Moderate Drinking?

Moderate drinking is no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men. Count one drink as:

- 12 ounces of beer
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1½ ounces of 80-proof hard liquor

Important!

If you are more than a moderate drinker, you are increasing your disease risk. Talk with your healthcare team about cutting back on alcohol.
Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea is a serious disorder. It is when a person stops breathing or breathes shallowly during sleep.

**Symptoms of sleep apnea may include:**
- Loud snoring
- Gasping or choking during sleep
- Extreme daytime sleepiness

**People with untreated sleep apnea are more likely to get:**
- High blood pressure
- Blood sugar problems such as diabetes
- Heart failure
- Heart attack
- Stroke

**Important!**

If you think that you might have sleep apnea, talk with your healthcare team. It is important to get a diagnosis and talk about your choices for treatment. If treated, you have a lower chance for further cardiovascular problems.
Emotions and Mental Health

Depression and Anxiety

Many people have depression or anxiety or both. This can raise your risk of cardiovascular disease. Talk with your doctor, nurse or mental health professional if you think you need help. People who get help for depression and anxiety often live fuller and more meaningful lives.

Symptoms of anxiety may include:
- Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
- Not being able to stop or control worrying
- Having trouble relaxing
- Being so restless that it’s hard to sit still
- Becoming annoyed or irritable
- Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen

Symptoms of depression may include:
- Little interest or pleasure in doing things
- Lack of attention to personal needs (cleanliness, clothing, food or medical needs)
- Feelings of worthlessness that don’t go away
- Use of alcohol or drugs to cope
- Moodiness or anger
- Too much or too little sleep
- Feelings of being tired or having little energy
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Important!

If you or someone else you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Maine Crisis Hotline at 1-888-568-1112. If you are not in Maine, please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.
Taking Action

The Goal: Get help if you are feeling sad, nervous or angry. Talk to your doctor, nurse or a trusted friend or family member to find out what supports are available in your area.

What You Can Do

- **Care for yourself**
  - Eat healthy foods. Get enough sleep. Get some physical activity every day, especially outdoors. Practice breathing deeply.

- **Enjoy every day**
  - Do something you want to do

- **Tell your story**
  - Find a friend or family member who is a good listener, and share your feelings. Write them down in a journal.

- **Celebrate successes**
  - Every small step counts

Getting Support

- **We all need and deserve support.**

- **Join a support group in your area**
  - Invite a friend or family member to attend with you

- **Seek professional counseling**
  - Sometimes additional support and guidance are needed. Your healthcare team can help you find a therapist.

- **Talk with a spiritual leader**
  - Your clergy may be able to help you with your feelings. They are trained to listen and provide guidance. This can help both you and your family.

Learn More

**Mended Hearts chapter**

A community-based organization providing education, support and hope to all types of heart patients and their families.

Visit www.mendedhearts.org or call: 1-888-432-7899
Birth Control

It is important to understand how using birth control affects your cardiovascular health. Here are some of the risks:

- Hormonal birth control methods such as pills and the patch may increase your risk of stroke or a blood clot. If you have cardiovascular disease, these birth control methods may increase your chance of having a heart attack.
- Smoking while you are on hormonal birth control greatly increases your risk of cardiovascular disease. If you use hormonal birth control, you should not smoke.
- Older high-dose birth control pills were linked to serious heart disease problems, but newer low-dose pills appear to be safe in most healthy premenopausal women.

What You Can Do

- You should discuss taking birth control with your healthcare team especially if you:
  - Smoke
  - Are carrying extra weight
  - Have been diagnosed with heart disease, stroke or blood clots
  - Have high blood pressure
  - Have diabetes
- The hormones in birth control can raise blood pressure. Have your blood pressure checked more often if you use birth control.

Ask Your Healthcare Team

- What are the benefits of using birth control?
- What are the risks of using birth control?
- What other options for birth control do I have?
Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

In the past, doctors thought hormone replacement therapy (HRT) protected women against heart disease. Recent findings show that regular use of oral HRT may increase the chance of heart disease in women.

If you are thinking about taking hormone replacement therapy (estrogen or estrogen plus progesterone), talk with your healthcare team about risks for stroke and blood clots. Knowing the risks and benefits can help you decide whether it is right for you.

Risks and Benefits of Taking HRT

- HRT can increase a woman’s risk of heart attack if she has heart disease. Because of this, HRT is not regularly recommended.
- For some women, using HRT for relief of menopausal symptoms may be worth the small increased risk of heart disease.
- Recent findings suggest that taking HRT in a patch form may be safer than taking it by mouth.
- If you and your healthcare team decide that you will use HRT, it is recommended that you use HRT for as short a time as possible.

Ask

Your Healthcare Team

- Is taking HRT really okay for me?
- What do I need to know about HRT and my health?
- What other options do I have?
What Is Cardiovascular Disease?
Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disease is often called heart disease. But it actually affects more than just your heart. Cardiovascular disease includes problems with your blood vessels, too.

These are all included in cardiovascular disease:
- High Blood Pressure
- Coronary Artery Disease
- Cerebrovascular Disease
- Peripheral Vascular Disease

Having cardiovascular disease puts you at higher risk for:
- A heart attack
- A stroke
- Narrowing of the arteries in the legs

Learn More
Learning About Stroke
Call: 1-207-662-1509 for a copy
What Happens in Your Body

- Coronary arteries are the arteries that deliver blood to the heart

- Arteries are red
- Veins are blue

- Arteries can become damaged, and plaque can form in the vessel wall. This often happens because of unhealthy choices we make, like what we eat or if we smoke.

- Other conditions can also damage the heart and arteries, such as high blood pressure and diabetes

What It Is Called

- When arteries become damaged, blood does not flow easily
  - A **heart attack** happens when your heart does not get enough blood
  - A **stroke** happens when your brain does not get enough blood
  - **Peripheral vascular disease** happens when the blood in your legs does not circulate well

- **Heart failure** is when your heart does not pump blood to the body as well as it should, because of damage to the heart muscle

- An **aneurysm** is a bulge or weakness in the wall of an artery. This can get worse over time, making the wall rupture and cause life-threatening bleeding.
Knowing Your Risk Factors

The good news is that you can prevent cardiovascular disease! There are some things you can’t change, but there is a lot you can do to lower your chance of having problems in the future. Your heart and blood vessels can get worse unless you make changes in your daily habits.

**Things You Can Change**

- Having high blood pressure
- Having high cholesterol
- Carrying extra weight
- Not exercising
- Using tobacco or being around smokers
- Having diabetes
- Having too much stress

**Things You Can’t Change**

- **Gender**
  Men’s risk of heart disease rises earlier than women’s risk of heart disease, but women have equal risk after menopause

- **Family history**
  If other people in your family have had a heart attack or cardiovascular disease, you are at higher risk. Know your family history.

- **Age**
  Your risk goes up as you get older

- **History of cancer treatment**

You can take steps to lower your risk, even though you can’t change your gender, family history, age or medical history. This is true even if you’ve already had a heart attack or other cardiovascular problem.

It’s important to make changes to address each of your risk factors. This may seem like a lot of work at first. Start with one thing at a time. Small changes can make a big impact. Making these changes is very important to your health.

**Ask**

**Your Healthcare Team**

- How do I lower my risk?
- How often should I return for checkups?
- Does my cancer history put me at risk?
Warning
4
Signs of
Heart Attack,
Stroke
and
Other
Heart
Problems
Warning Signs of Heart Attack

A heart attack happens when blood flow to the heart muscle gets blocked and your heart doesn’t get enough oxygen. This happens when coronary arteries become narrow from a buildup of fat, cholesterol and other substances that together are called plaque. Some people may have all of these signs, while some may have few or none.

These are the Warning Signs of Heart Attack

- Chest discomfort
  It may last more than a few minutes or go away and come back. It can feel like pressure, squeezing or pain.
- Discomfort in other parts of the body
  It may be in one or both arms, your back, neck or jaw
- Shortness of breath
  This may be the only symptom of a heart attack
- Other signs
  This may include having a cold sweat, feeling sick to your stomach or being light-headed

Be sure that family members and others close to you know the warning signs of a heart attack. The sooner someone gets help, the better.

Important!

If you think you or someone else might be having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 immediately. Even if you are not sure, call for help.
Women and Heart Attack

Heart disease is the #1 killer of both women and men. Nearly half of all heart attack deaths are women.

Women and men have different reactions to having a heart attack. Women are:

- Less likely to believe they’re having a heart attack
- More likely to wait longer to get emergency treatment
- Usually about 10 years older than men when they have a heart attack

Women are more likely than men to have these common signs of a heart attack:

- Shortness of breath
- Nausea or vomiting
- Pain in the back, neck or jaw

Women also have these less common signs of a heart attack:

- Heartburn
- Loss of appetite
- Feelings of being tired or weak
- Coughing
- Heart flutters

Ask Your Healthcare Team

- What are my chances of having a heart attack?
- What is my risk for another cardiovascular event?
- What should I do if I think I may be having a heart attack?
Warning Signs of Stroke

A stroke happens when blood flowing to the brain stops. Within minutes, brain cells start to die. Stroke is a medical emergency. If you or someone you know is having a stroke, it is important to recognize the symptoms so that you can get to a hospital quickly.

**These are the warning signs of stroke**
- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

**Important!**

If you think you or someone else might be having a stroke:
- Call 9-1-1 immediately
- Check the time so you’ll know when the first symptoms appeared. It’s very important to take immediate action.

The sooner someone gets help, the better!
Warning Signs of Other Heart Problems

These are the warning signs of other heart problems

Heart Failure:
- Shortness of breath, swelling in the ankles and weight gain

Heart Rhythm Problems:
- Palpitations, light-headedness and shortness of breath

Ask Your Healthcare Team
- How do I know if I am at risk for other heart problems?
5 Resources
To Learn More

MaineHealth Prevention

Provides guidelines and resources about cardiovascular health.
www.mainehealth.org/services/heart-circulatory-health/coronary-artery-disease

American Heart Association
51 US Route 1, Suite M,
Scarborough, ME 04074
1-800-937-0944 (toll-free)
www.heart.org/maine
Provides free pamphlets on stroke and heart disease.

Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/heartdisease
Provides information on prevention, risk facts for heart disease, educational information and resources about heart disease.

Healthy Maine Walks
www.healthymainewalks.org
Provides information about walking trails and paths throughout Maine.

MaineHealth Learning Resource Centers
Falmouth and Scarborough
1-866-609-5183 (toll-free)
www.mainehealth.org/lrc
Provides health information and education to patients and families. Each center has a library of books and videos on healthcare topics and health educators to help you.

Maine Heart Center
131 Chadwick Street,
Portland, ME 04102
207-661-7200
https://mainehealth.org/maine-heart-center
Provides information about cardiac services and physicians at a network of hospitals in southern and central Maine.

Maine Tobacco HelpLine
1-800-207-1230 (toll-free)
www.thequitlink.com
Provides free, private information about quitting tobacco to any Maine caller, including friends and loved ones of tobacco users.

MedAccess
1-877-275-1787
www.mainehealth.org/carepartners
Provides information to Maine people about low-cost medicines and local, state and federal programs to call for help with paying for prescribed medicines.

MyPlate
www.choosemyplate.gov
Provides information about food groups, portion sizes, menu planning and calories in certain foods.
Glossary
Glossary of Terms

The words defined here are in **bold black text** in this booklet.

**Aneurysm** (AN-yuh-riz-uhm): A bulge or weakness in the wall of an artery or vein.

**Arteries** (AHR-teer-ees): Blood vessels that carry blood to the cells, tissues and organs of the body.

**Cardiovascular disease** (kahr-dee-oh-VASK-yuh-ler dih-ZEEZ): Any disease that affects the heart or blood vessels.

**Cerebrovascular Disease** (SIR-re-bro VAS-kyuh-ler): A disease that affects the blood vessels in the brain.

**Cholesterol** (kuh-LES-tuh-rawl): A waxy fat-like substance that is naturally in the body.

**Coronary artery disease** (KOR-uh-ner-ee AHR-tee-ree dih-ZEEZ): A condition in which plaque builds up inside the heart arteries, causing your heart to receive less blood.

**Diabetes** (dye-a-BEET-eeze): A disease in which there is a high glucose (sugar) level in the blood.

**Diastolic blood pressure** (die-uh-STALL-ik blood PRESH-er): The pressure in the arteries between heartbeats, or when the heart is relaxed.

**Heart attack**: Event in which blood vessels that bring blood to the heart are blocked and there is not enough oxygen getting to the heart. The heart muscle can be permanently damaged if blood supply is not restored.

**Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems or ENDS** (e-LEK-tra-NIK nik-a-TEEN dee-LIV-ah-REE SIS-tems): e-cigarettes and vaping devices. ENDS do not burn or use tobacco leaves, but instead vaporize a solution the user inhales. The vaporized solution may contain nicotine and other chemicals.

**Heart failure**: Event in which your heart does not pump blood to the body as well as it should because of damage to the heart muscle.

**High blood pressure or Hypertension** (hahy-per-TEN-shuhn): When the force of blood against the artery walls is high enough that it can cause health problems.
**Hydrogenated oils** (hiy-DROJ-uh-neyt-ed oils): Oils that are put through a process that gives them a solid or semi-solid texture. Hydrogen is forced into vegetable oil to change the shape of the molecule. This creates trans fats, which raise LDL (bad) cholesterol.

**Hypertension** (hahy-per-TEN-shuhn): see high blood pressure

**Insulin** (IN-suh-lin): A hormone that lowers the levels of glucose (a type of sugar) in the blood and helps glucose enter the body’s cells, where it can be used for energy or stored for later use.

**Lipid profile** (LIP-id PROH-fahyl)): A blood test to measure total cholesterol, “good” cholesterol (HDL), “bad” cholesterol (LDL) and triglycerides.

**Palpitation** (pal-pih-TAY-shun): A noticeably rapid, strong or irregular heartbeat felt in the neck, throat or chest.

**Peripheral vascular disease** (puh -RIF-er-uhl VAS-kyuh-ler dih-ZEEZ): A condition in which the arteries that bring blood to the limbs (usually the legs) get clogged or partially blocked, often causing pain.

**Plaque** (PLAK): Extra cholesterol and fat that build up on the lining of an artery wall. It can make the arteries narrower and sticky, meaning less blood can get through and clots can form.

**Prehypertension** (pre-hahy-per-TEN-shuhn): When the top number of your blood pressure (systolic) is between 120 and 139 or the bottom number (diastolic) is between 80 and 89.

**Stroke** (STROHK): A sudden loss of brain function that happens when blood flow to the brain is interrupted or when blood vessels in the brain rupture.

**Systolic blood pressure** (sih-STALL-ik blood PRESH-er): The pressure in the arteries when the heart beats.
Your Health Toolkit
An Action Plan for Health

Taking care of your heart and blood vessels is one of the most important things you can do for your health and well-being. It can take some real effort because this involves changing daily habits.

To make the process easier
- Work with your healthcare team
- Set goals that you think you can reach
- Change only one habit at a time
- Keep at it. If you slip up, try again.
- Follow a plan that will work for you to lower your risk of cardiovascular disease
- Ask family members and friends for support

Important!

Cardiovascular Health Is a Family Affair
When it comes to cardiovascular health, what’s good for you is good for your whole family. If you are trying to make healthy lifestyle changes, your chances of success are better if you and your family make changes together.

Teaching your children a healthy lifestyle will also help them lead a life free of cardiovascular disease.
My Self-Care Action Plan

Name ___________________________ Date ____________

- Choose something you want to do. Not something you feel you should do.
- Choose a goal that you really think you can do
- Choose a friend or family member to help you meet your goal

1 What I Will Do

Choose One:

☐ Increase my physical activity  ☐ Lower my stress
☐ Take my medicines  ☐ Reduce my tobacco use
☐ Improve my food choices  ☐ Other ____________________________

I will ____________________________ (Example: walk more)

2 How Much/How Often

How much: ____________________________ (Example: 20 minutes)
How often: ____________________________ (Example: three times a week)
When: ______________________________ (Example: Monday, Wednesday, Friday)

3 Confidence Level

Circle a number to show how sure you are about doing the activity.

Try to choose an activity that you score a 7 or above.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
1 = Not sure at all 10 = very sure

What might stand in the way of you reaching a 7 or greater in your confidence level?

My signature: ____________________________
**Checkup Tracker**

Keep the Checkup Tracker for your personal records. This form can be used in many different ways. It can help you see the things you have improved over time. It may help you find things to improve.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Checkup</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Blood Pressure</th>
<th>Cholesterol (HDL/LDL)</th>
<th>Blood Sugar</th>
<th>Next Checkup</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: 9/13/17 10:55</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>116/76</td>
<td>42/106</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3/22/12</td>
<td>working on weight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Physical Activity Tracker

Goal: ____________________________________________

Example Goal: “I will walk 2 days a week for 30 minutes.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>How did it feel?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: 9/15/17</td>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>Good!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Weight Tracker

A healthy weight loss goal is no more than two pounds a week. Create a goal that you think you can do. Start small and keep at it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Goal Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: 9/13/17</td>
<td>250 pounds</td>
<td>220 pounds</td>
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### BMI Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height (in inches)</th>
<th>BMI</th>
<th>HEALTHY</th>
<th>OVERWEIGHT</th>
<th>OBESE</th>
<th>EXTREMELY OBESE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>4'10&quot;</td>
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**Instructions**

1. Find your height on the left.
2. Follow the numbers across until you find your weight.
3. Go to the top of the column to find your BMI.

To use the online BMI calculator, go to [www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi](http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi).
**Medicine Minder**

Use the Medicine Minder to keep track of the medicines you are taking, the dose, the time of day you take each dose and when your next refill is due. Use the notes column to write down things to discuss with your healthcare team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicine Name</th>
<th>Dose</th>
<th>Time of Day</th>
<th>Next Refill Needed</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Simvastatin</td>
<td>20 mg</td>
<td>breakfast</td>
<td>6/1/18</td>
<td>for cholesterol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medicine Name</th>
<th>Dose</th>
<th>Time of Day</th>
<th>Next Refill Needed</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</table>
Questions to Ask About Your Medicines

- What kind of medicine am I taking?

- What is it for?

- How much medicine should I take?

- When and how often should I take it?

- How should I take this medicine?

- What kinds of side effects could it cause?

- What should I do if I have a problem taking the medicine?

- What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?

- Do you have any tips on remembering to take my medicine?

- Is there a generic available for this medicine?

Take these questions with you when you see your doctor. You can also ask your pharmacist.
MaineHealth is a not-for-profit family of leading high-quality providers and other healthcare organizations working together so their communities are the healthiest in America. Ranked among the nation’s top 100 integrated healthcare delivery networks, MaineHealth member organizations include Maine Medical Center, Coastal Healthcare Alliance (Pen Bay Medical Center and Waldo County General Hospital), Franklin Community Health Network, LincolnHealth, Maine Behavioral Healthcare, Memorial Hospital, Southern Maine Health Care, Western Maine Health, MaineHealth Care at Home, and NorDx; the MaineHealth Accountable Care Organization is also part of the MaineHealth family. Affiliates of MaineHealth include MaineGeneral Health, Mid Coast-Parkview Health, New England Rehabilitation Hospital of Portland and St. Mary’s Health System.