

Self-Care

Tips for Heart Health



Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, but there's a lot you can do to prevent it. Taking time to care for your heart can be challenging as you go about daily life. But it's easier than you think to show your heart the love it deserves each day. Small acts of self-care, like taking walks, getting quality sleep, and cooking healthy meals, help your heart. Research shows that self-care can help you keep your blood pressure in a healthy range and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.



What does “self-care” mean?

Researchers define self-care as what you do to stay healthy. It's also what you do to care for any health problems you have, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or mental health disorders. It's [heart-healthy living](#).

What parts of your self-care routine help your heart?

Self-care for your heart is really self-care for your whole self. You can improve and protect your health overall when you:

- ✓ Get a daily dose of [physical activity](#), such as a brisk, 30-minute walk.
- ✓ Cook meals that are low in sodium and unhealthy fats.
- ✓ Take your medications as prescribed and keep your medical appointments.
- ✓ Sleep 7-8 hours a night.
- ✓ Manage stress through, for example, meditation, yoga, a warm bath, or quiet time with a good book or funny movie.
- ✓ Try to reach or stay at a healthy weight by moving more and having snacks like fruits and veggies ready to grab when hunger hits.

How can you make self-care for your heart easier?

The trick is to plan ahead. Build heart-healthy activities into your daily self-care routine. Schedule things that are both good for you and important to you. You might want to set aside time to:

- ✓ Cook delicious, heart-healthy recipes. Choose some from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's delicious heart-healthy eating [website](#).
- ✓ Go for a bike ride, take an online exercise class, or have a family dance party.
- ✓ Make that doctor's appointment you've been putting off. Many providers now offer telehealth appointments to make accessing care easier.
- ✓ Organize your medications.

What's your health status?

Part of self-care is knowing your health status. Even during uncertain and busy times, get your blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels checked. Talk to your health care provider about your heart health.



How can technology help with caring for your heart?

Your phone or favorite show can make getting off the couch difficult. But technology can be your heart's best friend! Tools that help with self-care for your heart include:

- ✓ Wearable devices that measure steps, heart rate, and sleep
- ✓ At-home blood pressure, blood sugar, and heart rate monitors
- ✓ Online activity and healthy eating [planners](#), like these from [health.gov](#) and [MyPlate.gov](#)

How does support from others help you care for your heart?

Many studies show that having positive, close relationships and feeling connected to others helps our blood pressure, weight, overall health, and more. Even if it's virtual, that support makes self-care easier and even more effective.

Research also shows that text messages can improve self-care. Connect with friends or family for support. Ask them to text you reminders or encouragement to help you meet your goals. Make new friends who share your goals. Join an online exercise class or a weight-management group to connect with other like-minded people and stay motivated.

How does self-care play a role if you or your partner is pregnant or considering pregnancy?

Self-care for your heart health is particularly important if you're pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant. Regular physical activity reduces your risk of gestational diabetes, extra pregnancy pounds, and postpartum depression. Talk to your health care provider about what physical activities are safe during pregnancy and soon after delivery. Discuss how to avoid and watch for a type of high blood pressure called [preeclampsia](#).



What are the obstacles to self-care?

Research shows that the three main obstacles to self-care are:

- Lack of confidence in one's ability to make a change
- Depression
- Having more than one health concern

If you want to boost your confidence, or if you struggle with a mental health disorder, seek support of family and friends, or talk to a qualified mental health provider. Ask your health care provider for help handling the demands of multiple medical conditions.

What does it take to give your heart the care—and patience—it deserves?

Self-care includes being patient with your body. You may not see or feel the results of your efforts right away. But small steps can lead to big progress. When we take care of #OurHearts as part of our self-care, we set an example for others to do the same. Visit [hearttruth.gov](#) for resources and tools to help you and your loved ones make heart-healthy lifestyle changes.



Move More

Making Physical Activity Routine



Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. The good news is that you can lower your risk of getting it or having a stroke by simply moving more. Many types of activity can help your heart—going on a hike or taking the stairs, biking to the store or around the block, wheeling yourself in your wheelchair. Figure out what works best for you.

How much is enough?

As little as 60 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity such as walking briskly helps your heart. For major health benefits, aim for at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) a week. Or go for 75 minutes a week of more vigorous activity such as playing basketball, running, or jumping rope, which gives the same benefits. The bottom line: More activity means a bigger boost to your health.

It's up to you how you reach your own personal targets. For example, 30 minutes of physical activity, five times a week, is one option if you're aiming for 150 minutes a week.

Can't carve out a lot of time in your day?
Don't **chuck** your goal, **chunk** it!
Try 10 minutes a few times a day, for example.



Only have 10 minutes? Consider:

- ✓ Walking briskly for 5 minutes, turning around and walking back
- ✓ Dancing (standing or seated) to three songs
- ✓ Getting off your bus early and walking the last stretch

You'll know you're moving enough to help your heart if

- ✓ Your heart is beating faster
- ✓ You're breathing harder
- ✓ You break a sweat

Or, try the talk test:

- ✓ During physical activities, like brisk walking, you should be able to talk, but not sing.
- ✓ During activities such as jogging, you can't say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.



Why move more?

Being active can:

- Protect your heart (even if you have heart disease)
- Improve blood flow
- Lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Give you more stamina and ability to cope with stress

If you're inactive, you're nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease than if you're active. Learn more about the benefits of physical activity on the [NHLBI website](https://www.hearttruth.gov/).

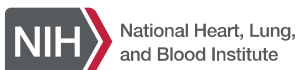
Get strong

In addition to aerobic activity, take time to strengthen your muscles. Try to work your leg, hip, back, chest, abdomen, shoulder, and arm muscles. Aim to do muscle strengthening twice a week in addition to your aerobic activities.

All adults should avoid inactivity.
Start gradually and increase slowly.

Learn more about:

- [CDC Target Heart Rate and Estimated Maximum Heart Rate](https://www.hearttruth.gov/).
- [Different types of physical activity](https://www.hearttruth.gov/).
- [Recommendations for children, older people, and pregnant women](https://www.hearttruth.gov/).



Get motivated

Try these tips to make being active part of your everyday routine:

Add a friend or family member

- Take a yoga or other fitness class online with a friend.
- Share your fitness goals with your spouse or roommate.
- Commit to a walking schedule with a friend or family member, even if you can't walk together.

Do what you love

- If you enjoy the outdoors, try biking, hiking, golf, or gardening.
- Play with the children in your life.
- Check out the track at a nearby school.
- Think of physical activity as a special time to refresh your body and mind.

Build activities into your day

- Do strength exercises while watching TV or listening to a podcast..
- Use a workout game on your gaming console.
- Take a walk during lunch.
- Go for a walk or a bike ride before you sit down to enjoy dinner or a movie.

When To Check With Your Doctor

Certain physical activities are safe for most people. If you have a chronic health condition such as heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, or other symptoms, talk with your doctor first.

Learn more about the risks of physical activity for certain groups on the [NHLBI website](https://www.hearttruth.gov/).

