



mercy care

# IMPROVING HEART HEALTH

Fall/Winter 2021

## Quitting smoking: 3 places to turn for help

If you have high blood pressure and you smoke, quitting is one of the best things you can do for your heart. It can lower your risk of heart disease and add years to your life.

Quitting smoking for good may take a few tries. The good news: You don't have to do it on your own. If you need help to kick the habit, here are three ways to find support:

**1. Talk to your doctor.** Your doctor can offer resources and medicines to help you quit. There are several types of medicines. Your doctor can help you choose what's right for you. Be sure to take them as directed.

**2. Join a support group.** You'll meet other people who want to stop smoking. It's a chance to share encouragement and tips. Your doctor or hospital can help you find a support group that meets in person or online.

**3. Call a free quit line.** You can talk to experts on quitting smoking. They can help you make a plan to quit. Call the National Cancer Institute's smoking quit line at **1-877-44U-QUIT (1-877-448-7848)**.

*Sources: American Cancer Society ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)); American Heart Association ([www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)); National Cancer Institute ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov))*

## It's not too late!

Flu shots are especially important this year. People at high risk for getting very sick from COVID-19 should get one as soon as possible. If you haven't had yours yet, don't wait.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))*

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Did you know that you may be able to get Lifeline cell service plus a smartphone at no cost to you? Go to [www.MercyCareAZ.org](http://www.MercyCareAZ.org) or call Member Services at **1-800-624-3879 (TTY: 711)** and ask about the Assurance Wireless Lifeline program.

## 3 steps to living well with heart failure

More energy. Better breathing.

If you're living with heart failure, those are good goals to keep in sight. They'll help keep you motivated as you tackle changes that can make a big difference in how you feel.

These three steps can help you keep your disease from getting worse.

- 1. Watch for flare-ups.** When your symptoms act up, call your doctor's office right away. They can help you feel better — for instance, by changing your medicine. The sooner you call, the better your chances of avoiding a hospital stay.
- 2. Weigh yourself every day.** Sudden weight gain may be an early tip-off that heart failure is getting worse. Try to step on the scale at the same time every morning — right after using the bathroom. Call your doctor if you gain:
  - Two to three pounds in one day
  - Five pounds or more in a week
- 3. Go easy on fluids.** Heart failure makes it more likely that fluid will build up in your body. Ask your doctor how much to drink each day. You may need to limit salt (sodium) in your diet too.

*Sources: American College of Cardiology ([www.cardiosmart.org](http://www.cardiosmart.org)); American Heart Association ([www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org))*



## Exercise: Show your heart some love

Exercise is good medicine for nearly everyone. Even if you have heart failure, it can be good for you too.

Exercise may help your heart work better. You'll likely have more energy too. Your daily activities may even be easier.

To get started:

- 1. Ask your doctor first.** Double-check that it's safe for you to exercise. Find out what activities are best for you. You may need to start with a supervised exercise program if you have symptoms like shortness of breath.
- 2. Choose your moves.** Most activities are good for you, even many hobbies. Be sure to include things that will get your heart pumping, such as walking or swimming.
- 3. Don't overdo it.** Start slowly and rest often. Even if you only walk for a few minutes each day, that's a good start. If that's too hard, you can begin with chair exercises. Over time, you'll build the strength to do more.

While exercise is important, your medicines are too. Keep taking them exactly as your doctor tells you to.

*Sources: American Heart Association ([www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)); Heart Failure Society of America ([www.hfsa.org](http://www.hfsa.org))*

## Take a step toward heart-healthy eating

Healthy food choices can help your heart, even if you already have heart disease.

You don't have to change everything at once. Start with small steps like these:

**Go for whole grains.** Choose whole-wheat breads, pastas and tortillas. Try oatmeal or whole-grain breakfast cereals. Choose brown rice instead of white.

**Use a new cooking oil.** Olive and canola oils are better for you than butter or margarine.

**Cut back on salt.** Read nutrition labels to find foods low in sodium (another name for salt).

**Switch to low-fat dairy.** When you get used to that, try the nonfat versions next.



**Sip sugar-free drinks.** Make water taste better by adding lemon or berries.

**Choose leaner proteins.** Go for fish, skinless poultry or low-fat ground meats. Trim fat from other meats.

**Plan one meatless meal a week.** Feature beans or pasta with veggies.

Once you've mastered one of these changes, give another a try.

Lifestyle changes like these are great tools to help protect your heart. If your doctor prescribes medicines, they're just as vital. Be sure to take them exactly as your doctor tells you to.

*Sources: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics ([www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)); American Heart Association ([www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org))*

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## High blood pressure: Check it at home

Is your blood pressure high? If so, your doctor may want you to track it with a home monitor.

Why? Tracking your blood pressure over time — not just in the doctor's office — helps show whether your treatment is working.

### Six tips for at-home tests

For more accurate readings at home:

1. Do the test at the same time each day.
2. Don't exercise, smoke, or drink caffeine or alcohol within 30 minutes of a test.
3. Empty your bladder and sit quietly for five minutes before a test.

4. Sit up straight with your back against a chair. Put both feet flat on the floor. Rest your arm on the table.
5. Put the bottom of the blood pressure cuff above the bend of your elbow. Wrap the cuff around your bare arm, not over clothing.
6. Follow any other instructions your doctor gave you. For instance, you may be asked to take two or more readings each time.

High blood pressure puts you at risk for serious health problems. Medicines can help — but only if you take them exactly as directed.

*Source: American Heart Association ([www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org))*



## Get healthy after a heart attack

If you've had a heart attack, there are things you can do to get on the road to recovery and better health.

Start by seeing your doctor as often as recommended. You'll learn how to help your heart mend and lower your risk for another heart attack. These steps can also help:

**Take your medicines.** They can help prevent future heart trouble. Learn what each one is for, and take it just as your doctor says.

**Commit to quit.** If you smoke, ask your doctor for help quitting. It may take a few tries, but it's one of the best things you can do for your heart.

**Change your eating habits.** Choose a variety of low-fat, heart-healthy foods. Ask your doctor if you need to cut back on sodium (salt) and added sugars.

**Get active again.** Ask your doctor how to safely begin. It might be best to start with a supervised cardiac rehab program.

**Tell your doctor how you feel.** You might feel sad, angry or scared after a heart attack. That's understandable. If it starts to get in the way of your recovery, ask for help.

*Source: American Heart Association (www.heart.org)*

## Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve

Need support? Ask your loved one's care manager about services that may be open to you.

## 4 ways to take charge

If you have a chronic condition, take it step by step:

1. Learn all you can about it.
2. Work with your doctor on a care plan.
3. Take your medications.
4. Aim for healthy habits.

*Source: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (www.niddk.nih.gov)*

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### Contact us

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(TTY: 711)

Monday through Friday, 7 AM to 6 PM

24-hour nurse line: **602-263-3000** or **1-800-624-3879**  
**www.MercyCareAZ.org**

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