



# PROTECT YOUR HEART

5 SIMPLE STEPS



The Heart Foundation is dedicated to fighting the single biggest killer of Australians – heart disease.

For over 50 years, we have led the battle to save lives and improve the heart health of all Australians.

Our vision is an Australia free of heart disease and our mission is to prevent heart disease and improve the quality of life of all Australians through our work in prevention, support and research.

## Protect your heart: 5 simple steps

**Step 1:** Eat a heart healthy diet

**Step 2:** Spend more time being active

**Step 3:** Be smoke-free

**Step 4:** Understand and control your cholesterol levels

**Step 5:** Understand and control your blood pressure

**Seeing your doctor for a Heart Health Check**

## Step 1: Eat a heart healthy diet

### What does a healthy eating pattern look like?

Healthy eating for a healthy heart is more than just swapping certain foods in or out of your diet. Healthy eating is a pattern: it's about what you eat over days, weeks and months.

Healthy eating patterns don't focus on one type of food or one type of nutrient to improve heart health. This style of eating is naturally low in saturated and trans fats, salt and added sugar; it's rich in wholegrains, fibre, antioxidants and unsaturated fats.

### Tips for eating a heart healthy diet



#### Eat more fruit and vegetables

Most Australian adults do not eat enough fruit and vegetables. A diet full of a variety of fruits and vegetables is linked to healthier hearts and a lower risk of heart disease. It's easy to improve your diet: just fill half your plate with vegetables at your main meal and try to include vegetables at other meal and snack times. Aim to eat five serves of vegetables and two serves of fruit every day.



#### Swap to wholegrain

Wholegrain cereals include more of natural grain, this means they have more of nutrients like dietary fibre, B vitamins, vitamin E, and healthy fats. When you choose breads, cereals, rice and other grains, go for wholegrain options. This can be as simple as swapping from white rice/pasta/bread to brown rice, wholemeal pasta and multigrain bread.



#### Make healthy fat choices

The best fats to include in your diet are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated (omega-3 and omega-6) fats. You can find these healthier fats in avocados, nuts, fish and sunflower seeds. You can reduce your risk of heart disease by replacing foods that are high in saturated or trans fats with these healthier fats. An easy way to start is by cooking with healthier oils like olive, canola, avocado, peanut and sunflower oil.



#### Herbs and spices instead of salt

We need salt in our diet, however, Australians are consuming far too much. Eating too much salt is bad for your heart; the sodium in salt can increase your risk of developing high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease. You can easily get your daily requirements from naturally occurring salts found in fresh foods. If you want to add extra flavour to your food, use herbs and spices instead of adding salt.

Visit [heartfoundation.org.au/recipes](https://heartfoundation.org.au/recipes) for more heart healthy recipe ideas.

## Step 2: Spend more time being active

### Why be active?

Doing regular physical activity reduces your risk of having a heart attack or developing heart disease. Keeping active helps to control common heart disease risk factors, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol and being overweight. Getting regular physical activity will also help you feel more energetic, have stronger bones and muscles and feel happier and more relaxed.

### Tips for being more active



#### Move more

Any physical activity is better than none. Being active doesn't just mean going to the gym, or playing a sport: it can be any activity that gets you moving. Ideas to stay active include going for a walk, gardening, going for a bike ride with friends or putting on some music and dancing!



#### Set realistic goals

Start with small, realistic goals and work your way up to the recommended 30-60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (like brisk walking) on most days of the week. Aim to do muscle-toning activities twice a week, including bodyweight exercises like push-ups, squats or tasks involving lifting, like carrying shopping.



#### Choose activities you enjoy

When you enjoy being active, you are more likely to do it more often. Vary the type of activity you do so that you don't become bored. Commit to being active at certain times of the day, like early morning or lunch time; doing this helps to make getting active part of your daily routine.



#### Get social when you get active

Stay motivated and build stronger connections by doing physical activity together with a group, with friends or family, or even with the dog. Join a Heart Foundation Walking group to boost your step count and your social circle.



#### Sit less

Adults who sit less throughout the day have a lower risk of early death, particularly from heart disease. At work, take regular breaks from your desk. Get up and take a break every 30 minutes. Don't want to miss your favourite TV program? Stand up to watch it and do the ironing or wash the dishes at the same time.

Visit [heartfoundation.org.au/active-living](https://heartfoundation.org.au/active-living) for more tips to be active every day

## Step 3: Be smoke-free

### Why quit?

The first step to quitting is understanding all the risks associated with smoking. Smoking damages the blood vessels leading to your heart, brain and other parts of your body. This makes you four times more likely to die of heart attack or stroke and three times more likely to die from sudden cardiac death.

### Tips to help you stay smoke-free



#### Quitting might take a few goes, so keep trying

Quitting smoking isn't always easy, it can take persistence. You can do it with planning, practice and help. If you slip up and start smoking again, learn from your quit attempt and have another go. Think about what made you smoke again, how you can better deal with this situation and what will help make it work next time.



#### Reach out for support

If you are finding it hard to quit, there are many supports available. Call the Quitline on 137848, talk to your doctor about medications that might help, or try nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), like patches, gum, lozenges, or mouth spray. You may need to try a few options to find the one that works best for you.



#### Quit for those you love

When non-smokers breathe in second-hand cigarette smoke, they are at increased risk of developing heart disease. To protect the health of your family and friends, stop smoking inside your home, car or other enclosed places.



#### The best time to quit is now

Quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your heart. When you quit smoking, your risk of heart attack and stroke decreases almost straight away. One year after you quit, your chance of heart attack is cut in half. The best way to get the ball rolling is to set your quit date.

## Step 4: Understand and control your cholesterol levels

### Understand cholesterol

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that moves around your body in the blood. Your body produces cholesterol naturally, and it is also found in some foods. Cholesterol is essential for the normal functioning of the body.

To reach the different parts of the body, cholesterol travels around the blood stream in tiny balls called lipoproteins. The two most common types are Low-Density Lipoprotein Cholesterol (LDL cholesterol) or 'bad cholesterol' and High-Density Lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL cholesterol) or 'good cholesterol'.

'Bad cholesterol' can stick to the walls of your arteries; this causes a build-up of cholesterol, known as plaques. This build up can create blockages in your arteries and contribute to increasing your risk of a heart attack or stroke.



**HDL** HIGH DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN



**LDL** LOW DENSITY LIPOPROTEIN





## Tips to help you control your cholesterol levels



### Get to know your dietary fats

Cholesterol in food only has a small effect on blood cholesterol levels but eating too much saturated and trans-fat has a much greater impact on blood cholesterol. Saturated and trans fats can be found in discretionary foods like pizzas, cakes, biscuits, pastries and deep-fried foods. Replace saturated and trans fats with healthy fat choices such as nuts, seeds, avocados, olives and their oils for cooking.



### Eat a heart healthy diet

Fresh foods should make up the main part of your diet. Choose a wide variety of fruit and vegetables and a variety of healthy protein sources including fish and seafood, lean meat, poultry, legumes, nuts and seeds. Make healthy fat choices by reducing your intake of foods rich in saturated and trans fats. Use herbs and spices to flavour foods, instead of adding salt.



### Know your levels

A key step in controlling your cholesterol is finding out what your blood cholesterol levels are. If you are 45 years or over, you should see your doctor for a Heart Health Check. The check will involve taking a blood test to measure your cholesterol. These levels will be considered along with your other risk factors to determine your risk of a heart attack or stroke in the next 5 years.



### If your doctor recommends medication, take as prescribed

In some cases, your doctor may recommend medication to lower cholesterol to reduce your risk of a heart attack or stroke. The best way to reach your treatment goals and enjoy the benefits of better heart health is to follow the advice of your doctor or pharmacist and take medicines exactly as directed. Don't stop taking them just because you feel better: they are working in the background to keep your cholesterol under control.

For more tips and advice on managing your cholesterol, call the **Heart Foundation Helpline on 13 11 12**. All calls are answered by a qualified health professional.



## Step 5: Understand and control your blood pressure

### Understand blood pressure

Blood pressure is the pressure of your blood on the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps it around your body: it's a vital part of how your heart and circulation work. Blood pressure that's high over a long time is one of the main risk factors for heart disease. As you get older, the chances of having ongoing high blood pressure increases.

Your blood pressure reading is usually shown as two numbers, with one number written over the other. The top number is your systolic reading, which is the measurement of the pressure in the arteries when your heart muscle contracts and pumps blood. The bottom number is the diastolic reading, which is the measurement of the pressure in the arteries when your heart muscle relaxes and refills with blood. A blood pressure reading under 120/80 mmHg is best for your health. Readings over 120/80 mmHg and up to 139/89mmHg are in the normal to high normal range.

### Tips to help control your blood pressure



#### Get active

Being regularly active helps to control high blood pressure and reduces your chances of having a heart attack or developing heart disease. Any physical activity is better than none. It's fine to start with a little and build up.



#### Minimise your salt intake


Eating a diet high in salt can lead to higher blood pressure. Having more than 5 grams of salt (a teaspoon) each day increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. The Heart Foundation recommends adults eat less than 5 grams of salt each day. Manufactured foods contain high amounts of salt, so avoid high salt foods, such as potato crisps, chips, salted nuts, processed meat and most take away foods. If you do eat packaged foods, look for 'No Salt', 'Low Salt', or 'Reduced Salt' varieties. Minimise the amount of salt in your diet by using herbs and spices in cooking and at the table.



#### Know your numbers

You can't feel high blood pressure. You can have this condition without knowing. That's why it's important to get it checked and learn about how to manage it. If you are 45 years or over, see your doctor for a Heart Health Check which involves measuring your blood pressure. These levels will be considered along with your other risk factors to determine your risk of a heart attack or stroke in the next 5 years.





Understand your risk of having a heart attack or stroke by using the Heart Age Calculator. Take the test today visit [heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au).

## See your doctor for a Heart Health Check

If you are over 45 years old (over 30 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples), you should see your doctor for a Medicare covered Heart Health Check.

During a Heart Health Check your doctor will assess your risk factors for heart disease including your blood pressure, cholesterol, diet and physical activity levels as well as your medical and family history. Your doctor will then inform you whether you are at low, moderate or high risk of a heart attack or stroke in the next 5 years. The most important part of this check-up is working with your doctor to manage your risk factors to improve your heart health.

### A Heart Health Check involves a few key steps:



#### Talk to your doctor

Your doctor will start your check by talking with you about your heart disease risk factors. This usually involves having your blood pressure and cholesterol level checked and talking about what you eat, how often you are physically active, whether you smoke, as well as other risk factors for heart disease like your personal and family health history.



#### Learn about your risk

Once your doctor knows your risk factors, they will enter this information into a web-based calculator to understand your risk of having a heart attack or stroke in the next five years. Your calculator result will show whether you are at low, medium or high risk of having a heart attack or stroke.



#### Manage your risk

Depending on your result, your doctor may encourage you to keep doing what you are doing, or give you advice, information and support to make heart-healthy changes to your lifestyle, including changing your diet, doing more physical activity, quitting smoking or reducing the amount of alcohol you drink. If your risk level is high, your doctor may prescribe medication to lower your blood pressure or cholesterol, or both.

### Heart Foundation Helpline

The Heart Foundation Helpline provides free personalised information and support on heart health, nutrition and a healthy lifestyle, please contact us on **13 11 12** or our website [heartfoundation.org.au](http://heartfoundation.org.au).