

ARE YOU AT RISK FOR HEART DISEASE?

Washington State Employee Assistance Program



The month of February is known for the heart and the symbol of love. We all tend to think of Valentine's Day and all the ways to show love to that special person. Learn about the risks for heart disease and stroke and stay "heart healthy" for yourself and your loved ones.

Cardiovascular disease, including heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure, is the number one killer in the United States. The heart's job is to keep us alive by pumping vital oxygen enriched blood to every cell of our body, doing all the jobs that keep us functioning. You may prevent cardiovascular disease through healthier habits, healthier living spaces, and better management of medical conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes. A healthy diet and lifestyle are your best weapons. It's not as difficult as you may think. It's not all about eating kale and exercising for hours a day.

Take It One Step At A Time

You can control a number of risk factors by making these simple changes. You'll be surprised how implementing these can become lifelong habits.

Work with your health care team. Get a checkup every year, even if you feel healthy.

Monitor your blood pressure. High blood pressure often has no symptoms. Have it checked on a regular basis. You can do this at your

pharmacy, nearest fire station, or buy a BP monitor you can use at home.

Get your cholesterol checked. Your medical provider should test your cholesterol levels at least once every 5 years.

Eat a healthy diet. Limit your sodium intake to lower your blood pressure. Be sure to eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Include foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, and

cholesterol and high in fiber. Here is a good resource for foods that are high in fiber. Some of them might surprise you. <https://fullplateliving.org/high-fiber-foods/list>

Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight can increase your risk.

Exercise regularly. Aim for 30 minutes on most or all days of the week.

Don't smoke, and avoid other people's tobacco smoke. If you do smoke, try to quit as soon as possible.

Limit alcohol use. Drinking too much alcohol can increase your blood pressure.

Manage your diabetes. Monitor your blood sugar levels closely and work with your medical provider about treatment options.

Take your medicine as prescribed.

Lifelong Changes

As you embark on this new journey to improving your heart health, remember to keep these in mind:

Don't overwhelm yourself! Making small changes little by little will have long lasting effects.

Find a partner to join you on this new journey. Sometimes it's easier to make changes with a friend and you can keep each other accountable.

Don't get discouraged. These small changes will seem minimal at first but will add up to big results over time.

Reward yourself for all your hard work. Find an activity you enjoy to decrease your stress level. A great way to track your progress and find support on your journey is the Smart Health website. Take your Well-being Assessment and earn rewards as well as learn new resources.

<https://smarthealth.hca.wa.gov/BrandedLogin.aspx?e=WASMARTHHealth>

Some of the information is provided by

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/HeartMonth/>