American Heart Association | American Stroke Association

My Life Check®
Live Better With Life's Simple 7®

Life's Simple 7® for Kids

Healthy Eating Nutrition Basics JUMP Having Fun
Recipes Playing Raising Healthy Kids Getting Fit
Healthy Habits HEALTHY COOKING *Healthy Living For All*™

Keeping Your Heart Healthy Through Life's Simple 7

Everyone wants to live a long and healthy life. To do that, it's important to do the things that make you less likely to develop diseases and to know how to get better if you get sick. Keeping your heart healthy is one of the most important ways to make sure you are feeling your very best. As a young person, if you start doing small things every day that keep your body healthy, you have a better chance of living a longer, happier and healthier life.

This booklet will explain how you can live a heart-healthy life. Keeping your heart healthy will also make you less likely to develop many other types of diseases, like cancer and type 2 diabetes. All of the recommendations in this guide have some important things in common: any person can follow them, the steps are not difficult or expensive to take, and even adding small parts of these recommendations into your life can go a long way toward helping you feel your very best.

Making Small Choices Every Day Will Help Keep Your Heart Healthy

You make many choices each day, like what color socks you want to wear or how you wear your hair. Through making choices, you can increase your self-esteem and be more confident and comfortable with who you are. When it comes to making decisions that keep yourself healthy, it may seem difficult to choose better options when so many things seem easier or just more fun. You just need to take small steps in a healthy direction and that begins by knowing the healthy choices! Once you have that knowledge, it becomes easier to make choices every day that help keep you healthy.

How Do I Know if My Heart is Healthy?

Figuring out whether your heart is healthy begins with knowing where you stand in relation to seven simple aspects of heart health. The American Heart Association calls these things Life's Simple 7. They are:

1. Avoid smoking and using tobacco products

2. Be physically active every day

3. Eat a heart-healthy diet

4. Keep a healthy weight

5. Keep your blood pressure healthy

6. Keep your total cholesterol healthy

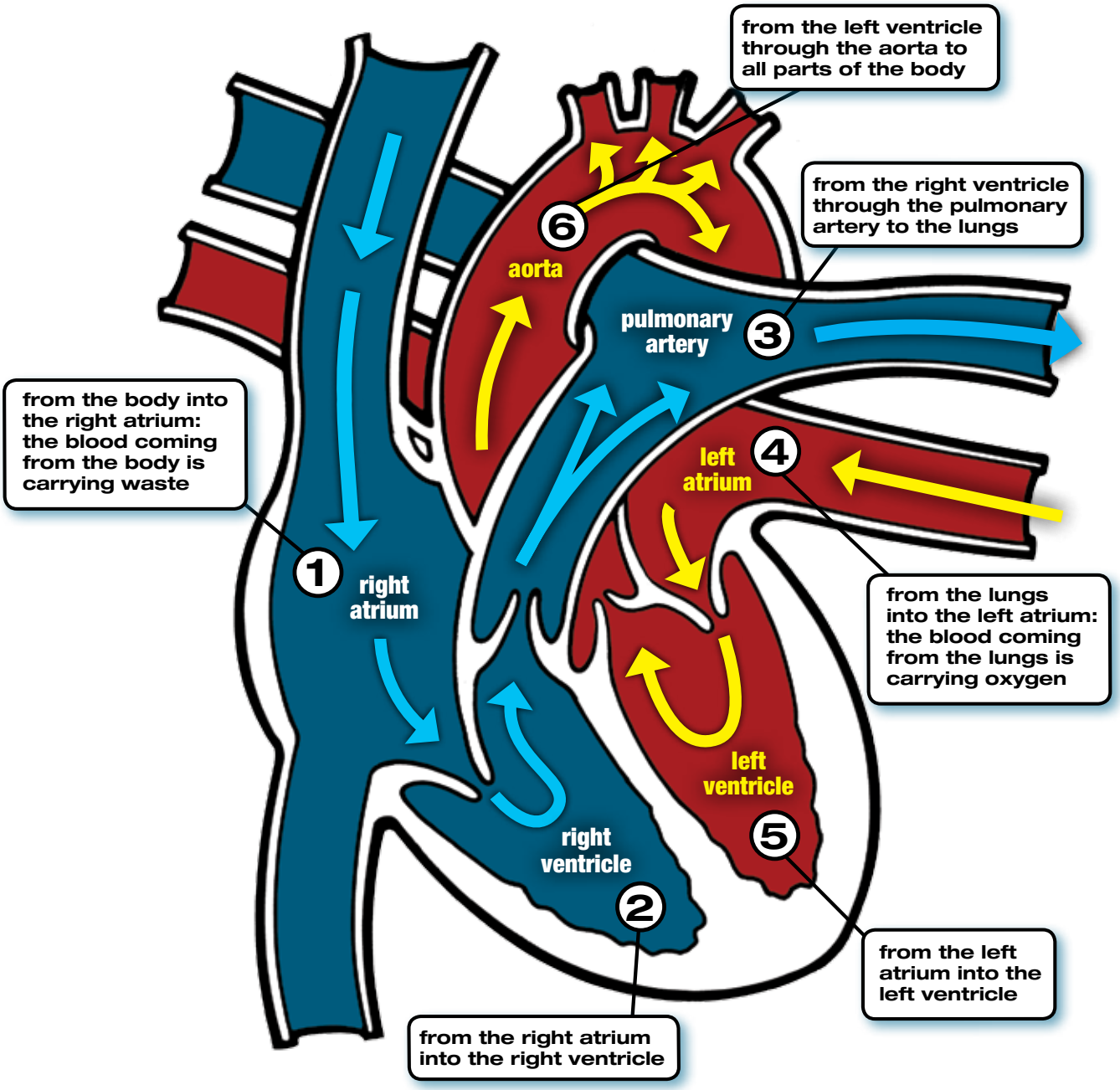
7. Keep your blood sugar healthy

The information in this booklet will help you understand these seven components of heart health and let you know how you can keep them in healthy ranges. To make this process fun and exciting, the American Heart Association has created a website called "My Life Check" (**MyLifeCheck.org**) that will help you understand all aspects of your heart health and give you and your family ideas to make the best choices. This booklet describes things you can do on your own to keep your heart healthy and some things that may require the help of a health professional.

But, first, let's talk about your heart.

How the Heart Works

Did you know your heart is a muscle? It is! It's about the size of your fist and it sits in the middle of your chest slightly tilted to the left. The one difference between your heart and other muscles is that it never gets to rest. When the heart pumps (or beats), it pushes blood through the body to pick up waste and deliver oxygen. This process is called **circulation**.



The heart is made up of four rooms or **chambers**. The two right chambers receive blood from all over the body and pump that blood to the lungs where it picks up oxygen and drops off waste from organs and other cells. Once oxygen-rich blood leaves the lungs, it goes to the chambers on the left side of the heart where it is pumped back out to body.

Each side of the heart has two chambers, one on top and one on the bottom. The chambers on the top are called the **atria** (or atrium, singular). The chambers on the bottom are called **ventricles**. The atria receive the blood from the body (right atria) or the lungs (left atria). The atria then pass the blood down to the ventricles, which push it out to the lungs (right ventricle) or the body (left vetricle). At the exact same time that the ventricles are pumping blood out to the body, the atria are refilling, getting ready for the next pump. Your heart never takes a break!

Blood always moves forward through the heart because it has four special doors called **valves** that open to let blood flow into each chamber. These valves are very special because after blood passes through they close to prevent the blood flow from going backward.

Blood exits the heart through the largest blood vessel in the body, which is called the **aorta**. Blood passes through the aorta and is delivered all over the body through an elaborate network of tubes called **blood vessels**. There are three types of blood vessels: **arteries**, **veins** and **capillaries**.

- **Arteries** carry blood from the left ventricle away from the heart and deliver oxygen and nutrients to the body. Arteries are red because when blood is carrying a lot of oxygen it turns red. The heart also pumps blood to itself because the heart itself uses a lot of oxygen and nutrients.
- **Veins** carry blood back to the right atria from the body. Blood returning to the heart in veins carries carbon dioxide and other wastes from the body. Veins are blue because blood that is not carrying a lot of oxygen appears blue.
- **Capillaries** connect arteries and veins. They are the smallest blood vessels in the body. Capillaries have very thin walls with tiny holes (called pores) that allow oxygen and other nutrients to diffuse out of blood and into cells to feed the body. At the same time, carbon dioxide and other wastes transfer into the blood to be carried back to the lungs to be exhaled. The appearance of blood turns from red to blue at the capillaries because this is the place where the oxygen being carried from the lungs is removed from the blood.

What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is also known as cardiovascular disease or “CVD.” CVD is a very serious health condition that stops the heart or blood vessels from working properly. When your heart and blood vessels are working at their best, blood flows easily and is circulated around the body freely. If there is a clog in our blood vessels or if our heart is not pumping blood properly, this prevents blood from being delivered to many important parts of our body. Not having blood constantly delivered to the many important parts of our body can cause serious illness or even death. Although some people are born with certain types of CVD, most people develop CVD as a result of poor lifestyle habits, such as eating unhealthy foods, not getting enough exercise or using tobacco.

Pop Quiz:

True or False? Heart disease is a problem only for adults; it can't happen to children or teenagers.

FALSE.

Heart disease can affect anyone at any age! The blockages that occur in the heart and blood vessels that cause cardiovascular disease begin developing in childhood. Far too many young people have unhealthy diets, use tobacco and don't get enough physically activity. Practicing healthy habits at an early age can help prevent the development of heart disease when you are young and later in life.

What is a Heart Attack?

The arteries that supply the heart muscle with blood are called **coronary arteries**. Unhealthy habits, like not being physically activity or eating a poor diet, can cause fatty deposits called **plaque** to build up inside your blood vessels and block blood from getting through. Arteries are normally flexible and elastic but if enough plaque builds up inside them they can become hard. This is called **hardening of the arteries** or **arteriosclerosis**.

When the arteries in the heart get hard and clogged, it causes two problems:

1. There is less space for blood to flow through the vessel. In the most severe situations, the blood vessel is completely blocked and no blood can get through to the heart itself.
2. The clog leaves a rough spot inside the artery of the heart that attracts other gunk, making the clog bigger. This can form a **clot**. The clot can break free from the artery wall and travel until it gets stuck in a more narrow space where it can also prevent blood from getting to the heart.

If either of these things happens, the artery can't deliver the oxygen and nutrients to the heart and the muscle of the heart starts to die. This is a heart attack.

Know and remember these warning signs for a heart attack:

- An uncomfortable feeling in your chest, especially in the middle of your chest. The pain may last for a few minutes or go away and come back. It may feel like someone is squeezing your chest, like someone is sitting on your chest, or you may just feel pain.
- Feeling uncomfortable or feeling pain in one or both arms, your back, neck, chin or stomach.
- Feeling like you can't catch your breath or feeling uncomfortable in your chest. Having cold sweats, feeling dizzy or feeling like you might throw up.

It's also important to know that the warning signs of a heart attack can be different for women. While chest pain or discomfort is still typical, women are more likely than men to experience other common symptoms — particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and pain in the back or jaw.

Call 9-1-1 right away if you or someone you know has any of these warning signs.

What is a Stroke?

A **stroke** happens when a blood vessel that carries oxygen to the brain gets blocked or bursts. When that happens, blood can't deliver oxygen to part of the brain and the brain starts to die. Without the right medical attention, a stroke can cause major damage to the brain. People who have a stroke may have problems speaking, seeing or moving normally for a short time or for the rest of their lives. The person can even die from a stroke. People most likely to have a stroke are older than age 55, don't eat a healthy diet, are not regularly physically active, are overweight or obese, or have other medical problems that may lead to heart disease, but people can have a stroke at any age.

Stroke is preventable, treatable and beatable. **Learn how to spot a stroke F.A.S.T.**

- **Face Drooping** Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile.
- **Arm Weakness** Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- **Speech Difficulty** Is speech slurred, are they unable to speak, or are they hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, like "the sky is blue." Is the sentence repeated correctly?
- **Time to call 9-1-1** If the person shows any of these symptoms, even if the symptoms go away, call 9-1-1 and get them to the hospital immediately.

Beyond **F.A.S.T.**, here are some other symptoms you should know:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the legs.
- Sudden confusion or trouble 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.

Living a Life Free From Cardiovascular Disease Needs to Begin in Childhood

Developing cardiovascular disease begins in childhood!

Some people are born with it — *Congenital heart defects*

Congenital heart defects are a form of cardiovascular disease that is present at birth. Each year, about 32,000 babies are expected to be born with a heart defect.

Many children born with heart defects are living longer, healthier lives because of new treatments that were not available even 10 years ago.

Most people develop risk — *Alarming trends*

Although some children are born with heart problems, many others who are born healthy can develop cardiovascular disease because they have poor lifestyle habits when they are young and as they get older. If you make unhealthy food choices, use tobacco or smoke and don't get enough exercise every day, there's a greater chance that you will develop CVD.

FACTS:

- Children who have CVD risk factors at age 13 or younger can develop heart disease as young adults.
- Children who have CVD risk factors in their early teens may have hardened arteries that look like the arteries of adults many years older.

Following Life's Simple 7 can help you live a life free of CVD!

Making small changes in your life can add up to a big difference in your cardiovascular health, even for children and teenagers! If you're born with a heart problem, these seven steps can help you live a healthier life, too.

1. Avoid smoking and using tobacco products

2. Be physically active every day

3. Eat a heart-healthy diet

4. Keep a healthy weight

5. Keep your blood pressure healthy

6. Keep your total cholesterol healthy

7. Keep your blood sugar healthy

It all begins with making the decision to follow **Life's Simple 7**!

What are Life's Simple 7?

1. Don't Smoke or Use Smokeless Tobacco

If your friends ask you to try smoking or smokeless tobacco, say no!

Here's why:

Smoking cigarettes or using smokeless tobacco (also called dip, snuff or chew) are some of the worst things you can do to your body. Just smoking a few cigarettes or using smokeless tobacco a couple of times might make you addicted, and it can be very hard to quit. Using ANY tobacco product damages nearly EVERY organ in your body and can cause heart disease and cancer. Using smokeless tobacco is NOT a safe alternative to smoking!

Why is smoking so bad for your health?

Tobacco contains a chemical called "nicotine" that gives smokers a pleasant feeling. People get addicted to that good feeling. In addition to the nicotine, tobacco products have lots of other poisonous chemicals in them. These toxic substances destroy your body over time, especially your heart and lungs.

Smoking causes bad breath, smelly clothes, coughing, yellow teeth and difficulty breathing.

Some of the 4,000 chemicals found in cigarette smoke and smokeless tobacco are also found in other familiar things:

- Acetone — nail polish remover
- Hydrogen cyanide — insecticide
- Urea — urine and sweat
- Methanol — antifreeze
- Cadmium — batteries
- Hydrazine — rocket fuel
- Toluene — paint thinner
- Polonium 210 — nuclear waste
- Formaldehyde — embalming fluid
- Lead — nerve poison
- Nitrosamines — cancer-causing substances
- Arsenic and Cyanide — rat poison

Avoid smokers, too! Breathing in smoke from someone else who is smoking is called **secondhand smoking**, and it is also hazardous for your heart and lungs too. When it comes to smoking and smokeless tobacco products, there is only one way to go to keep your heart healthy: Stay away! REMEMBER: If you can smell the smoke, then the chemicals are getting into your body!

Peer Pressure: What if your friend wants you to use tobacco?

Let's face it, saying "no" isn't always easy. It can be especially difficult if you have to say "no" to your friends. Most of us worry about fitting in and what others will think of us. But if you're worried that you'll lose your friend over smoking or using tobacco, you may want to take a closer look at the friendship.

Tell your friends that smoking can kill them!

A true friend will respect your decisions and someone who ditches you for not taking orders from them was never a true friend in the first place. Also, you may discover that some of your other friends secretly feel the same way you do! It takes courage to say "no" but you can do it! Actually, MOST teens have made the decision not to use tobacco. If you plan ahead, it'll be lots easier to stay strong and stick to your goal.

What are my choices?

If someone wants you to try smoking or use other types of tobacco, here are a few ways to say "no." Decide which way works for you.

1. **Be direct.** If a friend asks you, "Hey, do you want a smoke?" … say, "No. I don't want to." And sound like you mean it. If you say no every time they ask, they will eventually stop asking.
2. **Change the subject.** If a friend asks you, "Hey, do you want a cigarette?" … say, "No, but let's go play basketball, or to a movie, or go for a walk."
3. **Have a good joke or comeback line ready.** If a friend says, "Come on, everyone smokes." … say, something funny like, "No thanks, I'm a big fan of breathing." Or, "No thanks, I am not a butt kisser." (Get it? Cigarette butts? HA!)
4. **Walk away.** If you feel uncomfortable and don't want to say anything, you can simply walk away. It's as easy as that.
5. **Blame it on something else.** Use an excuse to say "no," like, "My mom wants me home now. Got to go!" or "It's not worth getting in trouble over it."
6. **Avoid the situation.** If you see your friends sneaking around with tobacco, you can decide to do something else besides hang out with them. It may be really hard, but if your friends don't respect your right *not* to smoke, try hanging out with some people who will.

Pick your favorite way to say "no" and try it out. Get comfortable saying it in front of a mirror. Or write down what you will say if you're in a situation where someone wants you to try smoking or use tobacco. It may seem awkward at first, but you will be prepared for how to deal with a situation that could be a lot more difficult if you aren't ready for it. Be prepared to use more than one choice if necessary.

2. Be Physically Active

IT IS CLEAR: Children, teens and adults who are physically active have healthier bodies and minds than people who are not physically active. Regular physical activity keeps your heart healthy and strong and it helps you build healthy muscles, bones and joints. Physical activity can also raise self-esteem, improve your mood, help you sleep better and give you more energy.

Making physical activity a part of your every day life is also a good way to help achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. It's important to be physically active *every day*. Think about it as being as important in your daily routine as brushing your teeth, bathing and getting enough sleep.

How much physical activity should I be getting to stay healthy?

The American Heart Association recommends that people under the age of 20 years get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity every day. What is moderate to vigorous aerobic activity? Some examples of moderate activity include: bike riding, swimming and brisk walking. Vigorous activity includes: jogging, soccer, aerobics or dancing. If you're breathing hard and sweating, then you're at the level of physical activity that will help your heart stay healthy.

FACT: Less than 50 percent of 12- to 19-year-olds get enough physical activity each day to keep their hearts healthy.

How can I make physical activity part of my daily routine?

There are many ways to increase the amount of physical activity in your life. The hard part is making the decision to get off the couch and be active. And you don't have to exercise until exhaustion each time; just get your body up and get moving. Just tell yourself that getting moving is something that you need to do *each day* and decide what you want to do *today*! Here are some ideas:

- Brisk walking, dancing and biking are fun types of physical activity
- Go outside and play instead of watching TV or sitting down and playing games on the computer
- When you play video games, play games that require you to get up and move, like those that involve dancing, exercise and sports
- If you have time while you are doing other things, take short, brisk walks in between for at least 10 minutes at a time
- After dinner, take your friend or dog along for a brisk walk around the neighborhood
- Make it a family affair. Take walks after dinner, go for bike rides or hikes on the weekend with your parents and siblings
- Get involved with school or outside activities that include physical activity
- Ride your bike or briskly walk to school or wherever you need to go
- Plan a family field day that includes some of your favorite outdoor games, like hiking, biking or swimming
- Check out your local community center for opportunities to join sports clubs and other recreational activities

- Start a new hobby that will include physical activity, such as karate, yoga, boxing, running, fencing, basketball, or whatever gets you moving while having fun. You'll meet new people and get healthier at the same time
- Join a sports team at school or in the neighborhood
- Instead of just standing around on the playground, *run around*!

Keeping track of my physical activity

Keeping track of how much physical activity you get is important to helping you stick to your goals. The American Heart Association has provided a worksheet (on the next page) that you can use to write down what activities you participate in every day. If you prefer to use an electronic tool on a computer or an application that lets you record the time and amount you are physically active, go ahead and use that. It is important to figure out what works for you so you can stick to it!

How much physical activity am I getting?

To estimate how much physical activity you get each day, start with making seven copies of the Physical Activity Log on page 12. For the next seven days, write down how long you participate in any physical activities that make you breathe hard or sweat. After you collect this information, add up the total minutes of physical activity during those seven days and record it on the worksheet on page 28.

Physical Activity Log

Date: _____

☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday ☐ Saturday ☐ Sunday

Time of Day	Activity	# of Minutes	Level of Difficulty	Level of Enjoyment
6:15 p.m.	*Rode my bike*	*35 minutes*	*7*	*3*

Total Daily Activity Minutes: _____

Notes: _____

_____

_____

If you did not exercise today, why not?

☐ Not enough time

☐ Didn't want to

☐ Other reason: Why not? _____

How difficult was your physical activity?

10 = Nothing at all

11 = Very, very light

12 = Very light

13 = Light

14 = Moderate/brisk

15 = Somewhat hard

16 = Hard

17 = Very hard

18 = Very, very hard

19 = Extremely hard

10 = Absolute maximal effort

How much did you enjoy your physical activities?

1 = Did not enjoy

2 = Neutral

3 = Did enjoy

3. Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet

Eating healthy foods is one of the most important ways to keep your heart working at its best. Starting good habits with the foods that you eat early in life is the best way to keep our hearts and bodies healthy for the rest of our lives. AND it's never too late to start.

Balance the food you eat and your physical activity to keep a healthy body weight

Our bodies are like cars – we need fuel to move. Food and beverages are fuel for our bodies. Every food we eat and many beverages we drink have a certain amount of energy in them. We call that energy "calories." One calorie is one unit of energy. So when you read on a food label or hear that a food has 100 calories, they're talking about how many units of energy are in that food.

Calories are important. We all need a certain number of calories each day to give us energy to move and for our bodies to function properly. Your body needs energy just to function and do things like make your lungs breathe and your heart beat. Activities like running, dancing and skateboarding require even more energy.

What happens if you put more gas in your car than it can hold? The gas tank overflows. When people eat more calories than the body needs for energy, the extra energy also overflows. But instead of spilling on the ground, it gets stored inside your body as fat. Eating more calories than you need is how people gain weight. To keep your body weight in balance, you need to match the amount of energy you put in (the calories you eat and drink) with the amount of energy you need for the activities you do each day.

In addition to making sure you're eating the right number of calories to fuel your body and help it stay healthy, you can choose foods that are better at helping to keep your heart (and the rest of your body) working its finest. The types of foods and beverages that keep you healthy are those that contain whole grains, vitamins and minerals, are low in salt and added sugars, and limited in the types of fat that harm your heart. If you eat calories from foods that have unhealthy fats (saturated and *trans* fats) or foods that are high in added sugars, your body suffers because these types of food can damage your blood vessels and your heart. You can make your own decisions about which foods and beverages are best for your heart health by learning how to read food labels.

How do I know what is in the foods I eat?

Learn to Read Nutrition Facts Labels

Start here. A **serving** is the amount of that food or beverage the information on the label is describing. A general rule of thumb is to eat ONE serving during a single meal or snack. The label will also tell you how many servings are in the package. If the label says there are two servings in the package, that's a hint that you may only want to only eat half of that package or share it with a friend.

Check total number of calories per serving. Once you see the serving size and how many servings are in the package, you can figure out how many calories are in the food you're eating. If you eat two servings that means you have to multiply the calories by 2.

Limit foods that have high amounts of certain nutrients. If the label says the food has lots of unhealthy fats (like saturated and trans fats) you might want to pick something else. Also try to limit foods that are high in cholesterol, sodium, sugar, or are higher in calories than similar foods or beverages. Making good decisions about what you eat often requires comparing the labels of different foods and finding the best option.

Start here

Check the total calories per serving

Limit these nutrients

Get enough of these nutrients

Quick Guide to % Daily Value: 5% or less is low, 20% or more is high

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 slice (47g)
Servings Per Container 6

Amount Per Serving

Calories 160	Calories from Fat 90
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 10g	15%
Saturated Fat 2.5g	11%
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 300mg	12%
Total Carbohydrate 15g	5%
Dietary Fiber less than 1g	3%
Sugars 1g	
Protein 3g	

Vitamin A	0%	Vitamin C	4%
Calcium	45%	Iron	6%
Thiamin	8%	Riboflavin	6%
Niacin	6%		

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Quick guide to % DV (Daily Value). The % DV section tells you the percent of each nutrient that a single serving of the food gives you compared to the amount that most people should eat in a day. You want to consume lower percentages of saturated fat, cholesterol or sodium; so choose foods with a low % DV, like 5 percent or less. You want to consume more of nutrients such as fiber or vitamins and minerals; so choose foods with
a higher % DV — like 20 percent or more.

Get the right amount of certain healthy foods and nutrients. Your body functions best when it gets the right amounts of foods that provide the fiber, vitamins and other nutrients your body needs to fundtion at its best.

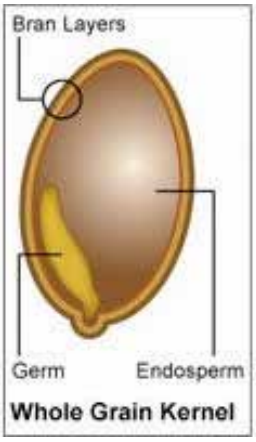
A serving size? A portion size? I'm confused. A "serving" is the amount of food recommended to keep your body healthy. A "portion" is the amount of a food you eat at any one time — which may be more or less than a serving. Try keeping your portion sizes close to one serving for each meal!

Eat your fruits and vegetables

Fresh fruits and vegetables are very important for your overall heart-healthy eating plan, you should eat them every day. Fruits and vegetables have lots of vitamins, minerals and fiber, and they are low in calories. Eating a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables helps you control your weight and keep your blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood sugar at healthy levels. A heart-healthy diet for children and teens includes eating four or five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, based on a 2,000-calorie diet. One serving includes one large orange or banana, one small apple, 15 grapes, ½ cup of raisins, or eight large strawberries. Try to include fresh, frozen or canned vegetables and fruits as part of every meal. You can add fruits and vegetables to other foods that are cooked or baked, or mix vegetables in with pasta sauces, lasagnas, casseroles, soups and omelets. Mixing fresh or frozen berries into whole grain breakfast cereals or into oatmeal is a great way to get your morning off to a healthy start. Fruits and vegetables also make great snacks.

BUT WATCH OUT: Some canned, frozen or pre-cooked fruits and vegetables may be made with lots of added sugars and salt, especially if they are packed in syrup or come with added sauces. Read the label and check ingredients. Added sugars and lots of salt are not good for your heart. So if you eat foods prepared in these ways, try to help your family select packaged fruits and vegetables that are not too sugary or salty.

Choose whole-grain, high-fiber foods



A grain is a type of seed that is grown for humans and animals to eat. These seeds can be eaten by themselves or made into flour to make certain foods. Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, corn, barley, quinoa (pronounced KI – NWA), or another cereal is a grain product. Bread, pasta, oatmeal and grits are all grain products. There are two main types of grain products: **whole grains** and **refined grains**.

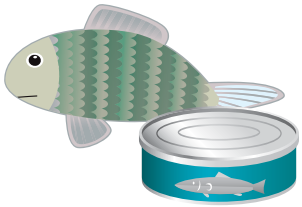
Whole grains contain the entire grain — the bran, germ and endosperm. Examples include whole-wheat flour, oatmeal, whole cornmeal, brown rice and bulgur.

Refined grains have been ground into flour or meal, which means the bran and germ have been removed. This process removes much of the vitamins and minerals that make grains so heart healthy. Some examples of refined grains are enriched flour and things made from it, like cake or cookies, enriched bread and white rice.

You can easily spot a food with refined grains if you see the word “enriched” on the ingredients list (which is often under the food label). If a grain is enriched, it means that some (but not all) of the vitamins and minerals are added back after they are made ready to eat. Some examples of enriched grains are enriched wheat flour, enriched bread and white rice.

It’s important to include a variety of whole grains in the foods you eat because grains are not only good for your heart, but they also tend to have lower amounts of calories compared to foods with enriched grains. Whole grains can be a good source of fiber, while refined grains usually are not. For whole-grain items, remember that the less processed they are, the healthier they are. So choose oatmeal instead of sugary cereals and whole-wheat bread and pasta instead of kinds that are more white and refined. You can also look for foods with millet, quinoa, wild rice, amaranth, whole rye, brown rice, steel-cut oats, rolled oats and hulled barley so you can decide which whole grain foods you like to eat.

Eat fish, especially oily fish, at least twice a week



Go fish

The American Heart Association recommends eating fish (particularly oily fish) at least two times a week. Oily fish like salmon, herring, lake trout, sardines and albacore tuna are the best for your heart since they are high in good fats called "Omega-3."

Eating fish — is there a catch?

Some types of fish may contain high levels of mercury, PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), dioxins and other environmental contaminants. Levels of these substances are generally highest in older, larger, predatory fish and marine mammals.

The benefits and risks of eating fish vary depending on a person's stage of life.

- For children, the government's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends avoiding eating fish that may have high levels of unhealthy chemicals (like shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish). Ask your parents to help you check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in local lakes, rivers and coastal areas.
- Children should choose from fish and shellfish that are lower in unhealthy chemicals (like canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish).

Tips for cooking heart-healthy fish

- It's better to eat fish baked or grilled, not fried.
- If you want to add a little flavor, make sure it's something that is low-salt and low-fat such as spices, herbs, lemon juice, vinegar and other flavorings while cooking or at the table. Try to avoid adding oils, butter or thick creamy sauces since these toppings usually add a lot of extra calories.

Limit your intake of saturated fat, *trans* fats and cholesterol

Saturated and *trans* fats are *not* heart-healthy fats. Try to eat as little of these as possible because they can increase the levels of fats that circulate in your blood. High amounts of fats circulating in your blood can eventually lead to clogged arteries and can raise your risk for heart disease. Foods high in saturated fats include those that come from animal products such as red meat like beef, pork, lamb, sausage, ham, and full-fat dairy products such as whole milk, butter, cheese and ice cream.

***Trans* fats** are found in foods made with "partially hydrogenated oil." Check the food labels and make sure to avoid food with *trans* fats. Most food companies have removed trans fats from their products but it is a good idea to read the nutrition labels carefully. If you see "partially hydrogenated oils" in the ingredient list this can mean *trans* fat so you might want to choose a different food if possible. *Trans* fats are most often found in crackers, cookies, doughnuts and fried foods.

Unsaturated fats, which are the fats that are good for your heart, are found in foods like fish, soybeans, nuts, olive oil and canola oil. Choose liquid vegetable oils and vegetable spreads instead of butter. Choose chicken, fish or nuts instead of beef or pork to increase the amounts of good fats (and decrease the amounts of bad fats) in the foods that you eat.

Choose lean meats and vegetable alternatives

Meat is an important part of many diets and offers protein, vitamins and many health benefits. However, eating fatty red meat, lunch meats and poultry with the skin on are not heart-healthy choices. Choose lean cuts of meat, skinless poultry, and lean-ground meats to cut down on your intake of harmful fats.

AHA Tip: Eat 2 or less servings of red meat (beef, lamb, pork) per week and eat chicken, fish and vegetarian dishes more often! It's also a good idea to have some meals during the week without any meat. You can use fish, beans, legumes and tofu in place of meat to help fill you up and give you protein, vitamins and minerals you need to keep your heart healthy.

Select fat-free (skim), 1%-fat and low-fat dairy products

Replacing whole-milk dairy products with low-fat or nonfat milk or dairy products is an easy way to cut the saturated fat out of your diet and keep your heart healthy. Low-fat dairy options include: low-fat or "light" cream cheese, low-fat or "light" cottage cheese, skim milk, reduced-fat or "light" sour cream, one-third-less-fat cream, cheese made from skim milk, and low-fat and non-fat yogurt. For additional options, read the labels and look for products that have less than 3-5 grams of fat per serving. REMEMBER: a single container of yogurt could hold more than one serving, **so don't forget to read the label!**

Drink and eat less beverages and foods with added sugars

Added sugars vs. natural sugar

There's a big difference between added and natural sugars but the differences can be very confusing. Not all sugar is bad, you just have to know what types of sugar you are looking for. Sugars in your diet can be naturally occurring or added. Naturally occurring sugars are found in foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose). Added sugars are sugars and syrups put in foods during preparation or processing, or added at the table.

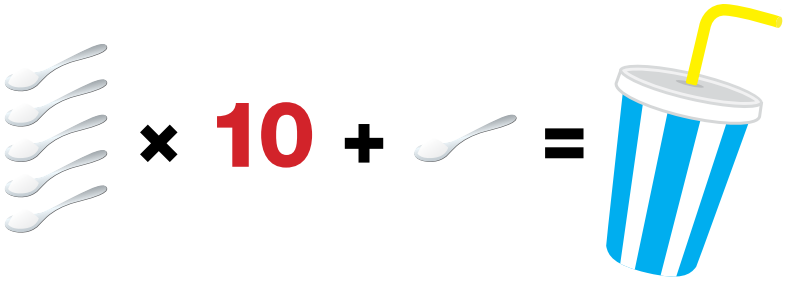
Where is the added sugar?

Added sugars include white sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, and other sweeteners that are added by food manufacturers. The major sources of added sugars are regular soft drinks, table sugars, candy, cakes, cookies, pies and fruit drinks (fruitades and fruit punch), dairy desserts and milk products (ice cream, sweetened yogurt and sweetened milk), and other grains (cinnamon toast and honey-nut waffles). The majority of added sugars do not supply any nutritional value and are considered empty calories. Young people are eating way too much added sugar and this can lead to obesity, especially if you're a coach potato, so cut back on these types of foods.

Added sugars means more calories and fewer nutrients, so try to keep your intake of sugary foods as low as possible. Kids and adults get the largest amount of added sugar from "sugar-sweetened beverages." Sugar-sweetened beverages include regular (not-diet) soda or pop, energy drinks, sweetened fruit juices, fruit punch, frozen drinks, sweet teas and sports drinks.

AHA Tip for sugar-sweetened beverages, soda and sports drinks: Drink no more than 36 ounces (or 3 12-ounce cans) per week. If you have had your fill of sugary drinks, water and skim milk are always a great option!

A 64-ounce soda can contain over 51 teaspoons of sugar! That is a lot of added sugar — more than any person should have in a day! Experts recommend that children, teens and adults drink less than 36 ounces (or three 12-ounce cans) of sugar-sweetened beverages per week. Many low-sugar drinks are better alternatives, such as skim milk, sugar-free drinks and 100-percent fruit juice. *Remember: Water is always the best option!*



Another type of food that provides lots of added sugar is breakfast cereals. Some breakfast cereals, even the ones that are labeled "whole grains," can be up to 40-percent sugar and add 12 teaspoons of sugar per serving! If you are trying to find a breakfast cereal that is a healthier option, look for one that has less than 9 grams of sugar per serving.

The Scoop on Sodium

Many people know that salt contains sodium, but the foods we eat often also contain other forms of sodium. This is why it's important to watch out for both salt and sodium in your food. Look for these words on food labels and ingredient lists: "salt", "soda" and "sodium." Soda is short for sodium bicarbonate, also known as baking soda, which is often used in baking. When looking for "sodium" it is also important to know that it is not always listed as a single word on food labels. It may appear as sodium nitrate, sodium citrate, monosodium glutamate [MSG] and sodium benzoate, for instance. These are all examples of food ingredients that contain sodium.

Eating a lot of foods that are high in sodium can lead to increased blood pressure and increase risk of heart attacks and stroke. It's best to consume less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day. On average, Americans eat twice that amount by consuming more than 3,400 mg of sodium daily! Some common sources of sodium include breads and rolls, processed meats such as deli meat, pizza, poultry, canned soup, and sandwiches or burgers. The sodium content of these foods can vary widely so it's important to read nutrition labels. You can find the amount of sodium in your food by looking at the Nutrition Facts label. The amount of sodium per serving is listed in milligrams, abbreviated "mg." You can practice reading sodium content on the Nutrition Facts label on page 14.

Ways to lower sodium:

1. **Prepare more meals and snacks at home from scratch.** When you prepare your food at home you have more control over the amount of sodium and added sugar in your food compared to the ready to eat foods you buy in the store or restaurant.
2. **Read the Nutrition Facts label.** Compare the sodium content of similar products and choose the one with the least amount of sodium you can find in your store.
3. **Make smart choices when you eat out.** Restaurant foods tend to be high in sodium. Check restaurant websites for nutrition information, including the sodium content of foods. You can also ask your server to help you find foods on the menu that have less sodium, or ask for your dish to be prepared without added salt.
4. **Swap your seasonings.** Many foods already contain at least some salt or sodium. Try a variety of fresh or dried herbs and spices like garlic, pepper, basil, cinnamon, or citrus juices to season your food without adding salt.

Making small decisions about the foods and beverages that you eat each day can go a long way towards keeping your heart and body healthy!

Go nuts

Nuts and legumes (plant foods that grow in the ground such as peanuts) are excellent sources of protein and contain many important nutrients, including unsaturated fat, fiber, vitamins and minerals. Unsalted nuts can help lower risk of CVD and other diseases. But be careful not to eat too many because they are high in calories. One serving is a small handful of nuts or one tablespoon peanut butter, or other types of nut-butter.

Ways to add nuts to your diet:

- A small handful of unsalted nuts makes a great snack option. But it also packs a lot of calories, so go easy.
- For extra protein, you could add nuts to your breakfast cereal, oatmeal or low-fat or fat-free yogurt

Some healthy habits to practice

- Instead of sugary drinks or fruit juices, ask for low-calorie drinks or water. Think about it: Did you have more than three sugary beverages this week? If so, you should probably just have water or a beverage with no calories.
- When looking for a snack, grab a piece of fruit or a small handful of unsalted nuts. Maybe some peanut butter and apple slices would be good.
- There is no need to reach for the salt shaker. A little pepper or other no-salt seasonings can provide added flavor.
- Did you get your whole grains today? You can have 100-percent whole grain bread instead of white bread on your sandwich and have some unsalted popcorn with no butter for a snack. You can choose brown rice instead of white rice, if there is an option.
- When buying groceries, look for low-sodium options. These are always a better choice and you won't be able to tell the difference.
- Are you eating because you're hungry or because you're bored or stressed? If you are bored or stressed then go for a walk or do something fun outside to get a little more physical activity today.
- Did you eat fish this week? If not, maybe today you can find fish on the menu or ask for grilled or baked fish for dinner.

Keep healthy foods within your reach

Check out the foods you have in your kitchen. What do you see? Do you have plenty of healthy options? Is your pantry stocked with whole-grain cereal, oats, whole-grain bread and nuts? Is the refrigerator filled with fresh fruits and veggies and fish? If not, talk to your parents and family about good nutrition and encourage them to eat healthier, and to stock healthier foods at home. You could suggest that the whole family think about avoiding foods with too much added sugar, saturated and trans fats and salt. Based on the tips provided in this booklet, you can help your family make smart and heart-healthy food choices. The easiest way to avoid eating unhealthy foods is by keeping them out of the house! If you start to think about meals ahead of time – just like you think about what clothes you're going to wear — you can make sure you have healthy food choices planned. Small steps lead to big changes over time, so start making the good choices more often.

Keeping track of what you eat

One important way to figure out if your diet is heart healthy is to write down everything you eat and drink for a few days. By looking at all the foods and beverages you eat in a day you can spot your good habits (such as eating three daily meals and choosing healthy snacks) and your bad habits (such as snacking all day and drinking too many sugary drinks).

There are many different ways to keep track of what you eat. There are free apps and websites that can help you do this online or by using your mobile devices. You can also use the Food Diary on the next page to help you keep track of what you eat. Write down what you eat for each meal or snack each day for one week. At the end of each day, review your Food Diary and ask these questions:

- Do I have a fruit or vegetable with every meal? If not, how can I add them in or substitute them for other foods?
- How can I pack fruits and veggies as a snack to avoid making unhealthy food choices on the run?
- How many sugary drinks did I have this week? Did I drink more than the three servings this week? If so, what drinks can I use to replace them when I get thirsty?
- Do I eat whole grains? If not, where can I substitute whole grains for refined grains?
- Do I eat many sugary snacks, like cakes, cookies, pies?
- Did I eat any fish this week?
- How many times did I eat red meat?
- Where can I substitute chicken or fish for red meat?
- Did I eat many foods that are high in salt?

When you have finished your food diary answer the questions on the worksheet on page 28.

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Date: _____

Food Diary

Time/Meal	Food/Beverage (type and amount)	Calories	Notes
Breakfast			
Snack			
Lunch			
Snack			
Dinner			
Snack			
Total Calories: _____			

4. Keep a Healthy Weight

Keeping your body weight in a healthy range goes a long way towards keeping your heart healthy!

As our bodies grow and change through tween and teen years, gaining some weight is part of developing into a healthy young adult. However, gaining too much weight at any point in your life can be hazardous to your health. An individual is considered overweight or obese when they have more body fat than is considered healthy.

FACTS:

- Today, about one in three American kids and teens is overweight or obese.
- Obesity and extra weight is harmful to almost EVERY organ in the body.
- Being overweight can lead to the development of many diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and cancer.
- Children under the age of 13 that are overweight may start developing heart disease as early as age 25.
- Obesity makes life physically challenging and often causes children and teens to experience low self-esteem, negative body image and depression.

Being overweight is dangerous for your health. It can lead to serious health problems like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma or other breathing problems and even some types of cancer.

How do I keep my weight healthy?

Keeping a healthy weight is best achieved over time and with a decision to keep yourself healthy. Everyone needs a certain amount of calories to perform their normal daily activities. If you gained weight, that might mean that you took in more calories than your body needed and the extra calories were stored in the body as fat. If you eat fewer calories than you use through physical activity, you can lose weight. Look at your food diary to help you notice how much you're eating and whether you're eating out of habit or boredom instead of real hunger.

You can take a few steps to reduce the number of calories you eat:

- Plan your healthy meals and snacks and stick with your plan.
- When you get tired and hungry, you're more likely to stop for fast food or snack on junk. Think twice before loading up on on the wrong foods.
- Plan healthy meals and snacks to help break bad habits.
- Invite your whole family to help you make a plan.
- Learn about healthy food choices.
- Read up on healthy food preparation, like steaming your veggies and avoiding extra fats.
- Read food labels and avoid foods that are high in added sugars, saturated fat, *trans* fat and calories.

Although the foods we eat play an important role in our body weight, it is also important to participate in regular physical activity. For overall health, physical activity that adds up to at least 60 minutes a day is essential. Even if you can't find time for 60 minutes, something is ALWAYS better than nothing. And remember, all activities count towards keeping a healthy body weight. Making active choices such as taking the stairs rather than the elevator or adding short episodes of walking to the day can help you

control your weight. We're all different, so the amount and types of exercise we each need to help maintain a healthy weight will vary. A good plan includes at least 60 minutes daily of physical activity that makes you breathe hard or sweat, like brisk walking, bike riding or running.

How do I know if I am at a healthy weight?

Since many young people are constantly growing, a healthy weight for children and teens depends on their age, height and weight. If you had height and weight measurements recently taken by a doctor or healthcare provider, you can use these measurements to determine your Body Mass Index or BMI. For questions or concerns about your weight, talk it over with your doctor or another healthcare professional. If you have a healthy weight, learn to keep your weight about the same. Keeping track of your BMI is a good way to make sure your weight is staying in healthy ranges. Every inch you gain in height, you can gain 2–3 pounds to keep your BMI the same.

5. Keep Your Blood Pressure Healthy

Fact: About one in 10 children and teenagers has blood pressure that is higher than normal.

Blood pressure is a measure of how easy or difficult it is for blood to be pumped by your heart through your body.

When the heart beats, the blood that is pumped throughout the body exerts pressure against the blood vessel walls. When your heart and blood vessels are healthy, the vessels are flexible enough to expand and contract. This expansion and contraction of the vessels produces the blood pressure. Sometimes, blood vessels become less flexible or narrowed. When this happens, the heart has to pump harder to get the blood to go through the vessels. The end result is an increase in pressure in the vessels or **high blood pressure**.

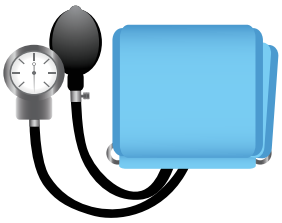
Why is keeping your blood pressure healthy important?

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is an important risk factor for heart disease. Having high blood pressure can lead to significant damage to your heart or brain which can lead to death. People often do not have any symptoms when their blood pressure is high. This is why hypertension is called the "silent killer." People with high blood pressure are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke than people with normal blood pressure. Fortunately, you can make healthy choices that will help you control your blood pressure. Keeping your weight healthy, eating a heart-healthy diet with lower levels of sodium and getting enough regular physical activity can help keep blood pressure normal for most people.

How and when should I measure my blood pressure?

Because high blood pressure is such a concern for cardiovascular health, children and teenagers should have their blood pressure checked. Measuring your blood pressure is quick and painless. You can have your blood pressure measured by your doctor, school nurse, or you can check it yourself using a blood pressure machine in a local store or pharmacy.

To measure your blood pressure, an inflatable cuff is wrapped around your arm. The person (or machine) measuring your blood pressure first inflates the cuff so that it presses against your arm and the gauge measures the pressure your blood creates as it pushes blood through your arm past the cuff.



Blood pressure is measured using two numbers. The first number (systolic) represents the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The second number (diastolic) represents the pressure in your vessels when your heart rests between beats. If the measurement is 120 systolic and 80 diastolic, you would say "120 over 80" or write it as "120/80 mmHg."

How do I know if my blood pressure is healthy?

When you're an adult, a healthy range is the same for everyone. But when you are a child or adolescent, healthy blood pressure depends on your age and height. Talk to your pediatrician or healthcare provider to be sure you know the best number for you.

6. Keep Your Total Cholesterol Under Control

Cholesterol is a waxy substance in your bloodstream and cells that is necessary for your body to function properly. Some cholesterol is important for good health, but too much cholesterol in your blood is not good for your body, your brain or your heart.

When too much cholesterol circulates in the blood, it can slowly build up inside the walls of your arteries that feed blood to your heart and brain. Cholesterol combines with other substances in your blood to form "plaque," which is a thick, hard deposit that can narrow the arteries and make them less flexible, and put you at major risk for heart disease and stroke. **Many kids and adults can have too much cholesterol in their blood without knowing it.**

Remember: You want your blood to be able to go with the flow, so keep your blood cholesterol low!

How and when should I measure my cholesterol?

If you are 11 years old or older and have not gotten your cholesterol measured, talk to your parents — especially if your family has a history of heart disease. Consider getting your cholesterol checked the next time you visit your family doctor or health care professional.

To have your cholesterol accurately measured, you should not have any food or beverages except for water for at least 12 hours before the test. You will need to have a small amount of blood collected in a tube so your doctor can measure how much cholesterol and other fats are circulating in your blood.

How do you control cholesterol?

About 25 percent of cholesterol comes directly from what you eat, so we have a lot of control of those numbers. Pay attention to your food choices, and choose foods low in saturated fat and *trans* fats and high in whole grains.

7. Know Your Blood Sugar

When you consume foods and beverages that contain carbohydrates — like grains, fruits and vegetables — the digestive system breaks down the carbohydrates into sugar. Certain foods, like whole grains, many fruits and vegetables and other high-fiber foods, take longer to digest, and this helps keep the amount of sugar in your blood from going too high. But foods like refined grains, potatoes, and foods high in added sugar are digested very quickly and are quickly delivered into the bloodstream as sugar. If your blood sugar goes high too often, it can overwork the body's ability to keep your blood sugar in healthy ranges. If this happens, you become more likely to develop **diabetes**. Diabetes is a very dangerous disease that often causes plaque to grow in your arteries at a faster rate which increases your risk of heart disease and stroke. Even if you don't have diabetes, you need to know your blood sugar level because controlling your blood sugar is an important part of stopping heart disease before it starts.

To measure your blood sugar, you need to get help from your family doctor or health care professional. To have your blood glucose accurately measured, you should not have any food or beverage except for water for at least four to six hours. As when measuring your cholesterol, you will need to have a small amount of blood collected in a tube so your doctor can measure how much glucose is circulating in it.

Diabetes: What is it?

In diabetes, the body has problems either using or making a hormone called **insulin**. Insulin is important to the body because it helps turn sugar and other food into energy the body can use. When the body does not have enough insulin, it causes too much sugar to build up in your blood, which can cause damage to your heart and other parts of your body.

There are two main types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 diabetes means the body does not make enough insulin to function. It is the type of diabetes that occurs mostly in very young people and comes on very suddenly. Type 2 develops in a person over time because of bad habits. Being overweight and not getting enough regular physical activity are two bad habits that can lead to developing diabetes. Teenagers are now starting to develop type 2 diabetes. Once a person has type 2 diabetes, they are at risk for problems with almost every part of their body if they don't take good care of themselves. Some of the problems they can develop are:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Eye damage and blindness
- Kidney damage
- Foot damage, even amputation
- Hearing problems

Diabetes Warning Signs:

- Always thirsty
- Always tired
- Always hungry
- Blurry vision
- Going to the bathroom frequently
- Losing weight quickly

If you notice any diabetes warning signs in yourself or someone else, tell a parent, teacher or doctor right away! If you have been told you have diabetes, make sure to take your medicine exactly as your doctor has prescribed. Making good changes to your diet and getting enough physical activity can also help you keep your diabetes under control.

If my blood pressure, cholesterol or glucose is too high, what can I do to bring them down?

Good news! Whether your blood pressure, cholesterol or glucose is high or normal, you can help keep your heart healthy by following the first four steps in Life's Simple 7:

- Avoiding using tobacco of any kind and avoid people who are using it. Inhaling smoke from other people who are using tobacco is very harmful to your health.
- Eating a heart-healthy diet, including lots of whole grains, fruits and vegetables, nuts and fish, and minimizing added sugars, saturated and *trans* fats and sodium.
- Enjoying regular physical activity.
- Maintaining a healthy weight.

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My Life Check®
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Get Your Personal Heart Score with My Life Check

The American Heart Association has created an online tool to help you find out how you are doing with your heart health. This tool is called "My Life Check." All of us need to practice Life's Simple 7 to live a heart-healthy life, and no one achieves heart health by accident. The My Life Check online tool empowers children, teens and adults to take a step toward a better life through measuring their heart health.

Use the information you collected about yourself in this booklet to fill out this worksheet. Then visit **MyLifeCheck.org** and enter your information to learn where you stand with each of your Life's Simple 7. On this website you can get your personal heart score, and get a custom plan with the information you need to start living your best. With Life's Simple 7 you can KNOW you're heart healthy.

Remember, you can stop heart disease before it starts. Start small and keep it simple. Make one change today and then you're ready to make another. Before you know it, you've stopped making poor choices and started making heart-healthy ones.

Physical Activity

- Record your total minutes of physical activity for the week from your Physical Activity Log: _____ minutes

Healthy Diet

- Use your Food Diary to answer the following questions:
  - How much fruit do you eat in an average day? _____ cups
  - How many vegetables do you eat in an average day? _____ cups
  - Do you eat 2 servings or more of fish weekly?
  - Do you eat 4 ounces or more of whole grains daily?
  - Do you drink less than 36 ounces of beverages with added sugar weekly?
  - Do you eat 1,500 mg of sodium or less daily?

Healthy Weight

- Record your age, height, and weight:

  _____ Age _____ Height (Inches) _____ Weight (Pounds)

Blood Pressure

- Record your height and your blood pressure measurements:

  Blood Pressure: _____ / _____ mmHg

Blood Cholesterol

- Record your cholesterol measurements: _____ mg/dL

Blood Sugar

- Record your blood sugar measurement: _____ mg/dL

Visit These Great Websites for Fun and Helpful Health Information

Heart.org/HealthierKids

The American Heart Association is working to help kids and families live heart-healthy lives. Visit our website for great resources and to learn how you can help your child develop healthy habits early in life that will bring lifelong benefits.

MyLifeCheck.org

My Life Check is an American Heart Association website that helps educate the public on how best to live. This website assists in understanding and making changes to Life's Simple 7. These measures have several unique things in common: any person can make these changes, the steps are not expensive to take and even modest improvements to your health will make a big difference.

KidsHealth.org

KidsHealth is the largest and most-visited site on the Web that provides doctor-approved health information from before birth through adolescence. Created by The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media, KidsHealth provides families with accurate, up-to-date and jargon-free health information. The site includes games and activities for kids as well as advice for teens.

HealthyFridge.org.

The site brings awareness to the importance of developing healthy eating habits at an early age. The site includes fun activities and information for parents and teens.

www.bam.gov

BAM! Body and Mind is a children's website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The interactive activity calendar helps kids make a personalized calendar of the activities they're planning to do as well as a recipe finder for healthy snacks. Activity cards show how different activities affect the body.

kidsnutrition.org

This site contains research, news, calculators (including a children's BMI calculator), and a Portion-Distortion Quiz. The site also has recent articles and research.

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Healthy Eating Nutrition Basics JUMP Having Fun
Recipes Playing Raising Healthy Kids Getting Fit
Healthy Habits HEALTHY COOKING Seven Simple Steps