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# Lifestyle Changes to Improve Heart Health

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## Open Your Heart to a Healthy Diet

- ♥ Aim for a diverse diet that includes a variety of food from different food groups.
- ♥ Make at least half of all your grains whole grains.
- ♥ Keep it colorful! Choose a variety of fruits. Aim for 3-a-day.
- ♥ Include an array of vegetables in your diet. Make leafy green vegetables a staple. Consider adopting a plant-based diet.
- ♥ Include healthy fats such as ground flaxseed, nuts, nut butters, seeds, avocados, & olives.
- ♥ Choose low sodium products and prepare foods with little to no salt.
- ♥ Avoid fried foods, fast foods and processed foods.
- ♥ Avoid processed meats, red meat, full-fat cheeses, chips, whole milk, butter, chicken skin, and fatty cuts of meat.
- ♥ Reduce consumption of sweets, cookies, cakes, donuts, pastries, sugary cereals, ice cream, candy, chocolate, sugar-sweetened beverage (soda, sweet tea, fruit drinks) & other added sugars.
- ♥ Stay hydrated with water, unsweetened tea, or carbonated water. Aim for 8 glasses each day.

## Get A Move On!

- ♥ Work up to 30 minutes of activity 5 to 7 days of the week. Any activity counts if it makes you breathe harder. If you can't be active for 30 minutes all at once, get at least 10 minutes three times a day. To lose weight, build up to 60 minutes each day.

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- ♥ Do things you enjoy to become more active. You can go for a brisk walk, ride a bike, dance, or swim!
  - ♥ Make it part of your daily routine! Take the stairs, park at the far end of the parking lot, do yard work, carry your golf clubs, or walk the golf course.
  - ♥ Make your steps count! Aim for 10,000 steps or about 5 miles a day. Use a pedometer, smartphone or activity tracker to help you count them off.
  - ♥ Exercise raises HDL (good) cholesterol, improves blood sugar and blood pressure, and aids in weight management.

### **Watch Your Weight**

- ♥ Being overweight increases your risk of heart disease.
- ♥ Follow an eating schedule. Plan your meals and snacks in advance and stick to it. Eat slowly, taking at least 20 minutes to eat a meal and 10 minutes for a snack. Leave the table when you are through eating. Put away leftovers right away.
- ♥ Keep problem foods out of the house. Never shop for food on an empty stomach. Make a grocery list and stick to it. Avoid areas of the store that have foods that are not on your list. Do not take others with you if they get you to buy foods not on your list!
- ♥ Do not give up if you stray from a healthy eating plan. Get back on track at the next meal!

### **Do Not Smoke**

- ♥ Cigarette smoking thickens and narrows artery walls and decreases your HDL (good) cholesterol. It increases your risk of a heart attack or stroke.

### **Avoid Alcohol**

- ♥ If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. This means one to two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women. A

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drink is one 12-ounce beer, 4 ounces of wine, 1 ½ ounces of 80-proof spirits, or one ounce of 100-proof spirits.

- ♥ Given the risks of high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, cancer, alcoholism, suicide, and accidents, the American Heart Association cautions people not to start drinking if they do not already drink alcohol.
- ♥ Discuss your decision to drink alcohol and possible medication interactions with your healthcare provider.

### **Ask For Help**

- ♥ Interested in losing weight? Ask your PACT team how you can enroll in the MOVE! program.
- ♥ Ask for help in planning an exercise program if needed. Ask your doctor for a consult to kinesiotherapy or physical therapy for help in planning an exercise program tailored to your ability and physical limitations.
- ♥ If you take medicine, be sure you take it as ordered. Ask for help if you have any questions about medicines that you are taking. If you have questions about your medication contact your PACT Team nurse or pharmacist.
- ♥ If you need help quitting smoking, let your PACT team know. VA offers smoking cessation classes and other aids.

### **Want More Information?**

- ♥ [American Heart Association](#)
- ♥ [MOVE!](#)
- ♥ United States Department of Agriculture "[Choose My Plate](#)