

# TH TOP HEALTH®

The Health Promotion and Wellness Newsletter.

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## Live Smart for Your Heart

— Diane McReynolds, Founder, Personal Best Healthlines



### What can you do to protect your heart?

During **American Heart Month**, review the basic recommendations for preventing coronary heart disease.

- ♥ **Maintain a healthy weight.** Learn your waist circumference; high numbers reflect excess belly fat, which raises heart disease risk. Keep your waist circumference below 35 inches (for women) or below 40 inches (for men).
- ♥ **Abstain from smoking.** Cigarette smokers are 2 to 3 times more likely than nonsmokers to die from coronary heart disease.
- ♥ **Exercise regularly.** Routine cardio exercise, such as a daily brisk walk, can help your heart, blood pressure, blood sugar and your weight. Get at least 30 minutes of cardio exercise 5 days and 2 to 3 strength-training sessions a week.
- ♥ **Watch what you eat.** Heart-friendly eating starts with limiting saturated and trans fats, and includes lean protein, such as beans, poultry, soy-based foods, low-fat dairy and nuts. Also eat at least 2 cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables every day.
- ♥ **Get health screenings.** These include monitoring your blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides and blood sugar throughout life.

**Mobile medical apps** can aid doctors in diagnosing patients without having them come into the office. They can also help patients manage their chronic conditions. Others are being designed for smartphones and tablets to function as medical devices, such as a portable electrocardiogram machine. To help ensure these tools operate properly, some of these medical apps will be subject to the same FDA regulatory standards that apply to the medical devices they resemble.



## Weight-Loss Gains

**There are some powerful reasons to lose weight**, beyond improving the look of your body. Being overweight or obese raises your risk for developing several chronic conditions – diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and others.

Losing even a small amount of excess weight can produce many protective health benefits.

- Blood pressure decreases.
- Blood sugar levels decrease in people with type 2 diabetes.
- Cholesterol and triglyceride levels improve.
- Unhealthy abdominal fat decreases.
- Pain and disability from osteoarthritis decreases.
- Sleep improves, particularly in people with obstructive sleep apnea.



Weight loss can sometimes reduce or eliminate the need for medications to control hypertension, type 2 diabetes and arthritis.

**You gain by losing.** People who maintain a significant weight loss report improvements in energy levels, physical mobility, general mood, self-confidence, and general quality of life, according to the National Weight Control Registry. (The Registry tracks more than 10,000 people who have maintained long-term weight loss.)

**How you lose the weight matters.** The best plan is one you can live with long term. Ultra-strict diets, fasting and drugs may have adverse health effects and provide merely temporary results. The proven formula: nutritious meal planning, removing food cues from your home and work, with a little splurging, daily exercise and patience.

**Guidelines for improving health:** Target a weight loss of 10% of your body weight (e.g., losing 20 pounds if you weigh 200) at a rate of 1 to 2 pounds per week. The results will vary depending on your metabolism, physical activity and other factors.

*Imagine feeling lighter as you climb stairs and walk and move about, free of that extra 20 pounds.*



# Exercise: *Who Needs a Medical OK?*

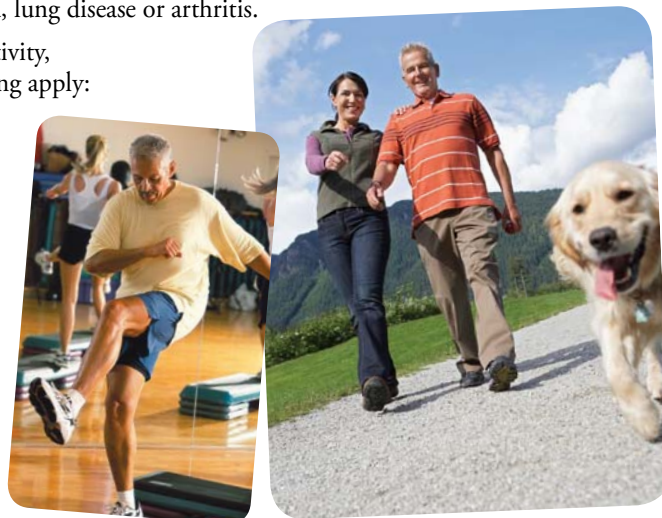
**Your first step to physical fitness may be talking with your health care provider about exercise** – especially if you have multiple health problems or are pregnant or unsure of your health status. The American College of Sports Medicine offers these guidelines.

**1 ONE** – Most people can safely begin walking (moderate-intensity exercise) immediately, provided they are injury-free. Gradually increase your pace to a challenging but comfortable level. The minimal goal is 30 minutes 5 days a week. Check with your provider first if you have heart disease, asthma, lung disease or arthritis.

**2 TWO** – Contact your provider before engaging in vigorous-intensity activity, such as jogging or strength building, if 2 or more of the following apply:

- You're a man age 45-plus or a woman age 55-plus.
- You have a family history of heart disease before age 55.
- You smoke or you have quit smoking in the past 6 months.
- You haven't exercised for 3 months or more.
- You're overweight or obese.
- You have high blood pressure or high cholesterol.
- You have diabetes or prediabetes.

**3 THREE** – See your provider if you have these symptoms: pain or discomfort in your chest or neck during physical activity; dizziness; shortness of breath with mild exertion or at rest; ankle swelling; or muscle pain when walking up stairs.



## Add DASH to Your Plate

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

**Whether you have high blood pressure (HBP) or are trying to prevent it,** the DASH eating plan offers the right combination of foods to keep your levels in check.

DASH stands for **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension**. It emphasizes vegetables, fruit, whole grains, lean protein, legumes, nuts and low-fat dairy products. It's low in saturated fat, sugar and sodium.

**Slash salt.** DASH researchers found that a daily limit of 2,300 mg of sodium (a teaspoon of salt) helps blood pressure (BP), but less is better. A limit of 1,500 mg a day can reduce BP levels and lower the risk for HBP and heart disease in general. Yet most of us consume an average of 3,400 mg a day. **Good start:** Limit processed foods, which typically supply 75% of sodium in the U.S. diet.

**Got milk?** Dairy products contain key minerals – including calcium, potassium and magnesium – that help lower blood pressure. Aim for 2 to 3 daily servings (1 cup each) of skim or low-fat milk or yogurt.

**Fill up on fiber.** Consume 30 grams of fiber each day. It's easy – just fill your plate with the plant foods listed above.

**Wait – there's more.** DASH will also reduce your risk for developing diabetes, heart disease, stroke, memory loss and some types of cancer. **Eating well pays off:** The DASH diet may be as effective as medicine at lowering blood pressure levels. Search for “DASH” at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov).

## Expert Advice

– Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAP



### Q: Hepatitis C treatment?

**A:** This chronic viral liver infection is usually contracted from contaminated blood. It may not need treatment; monitoring the liver with blood tests may be sufficient. But over many years the hepatitis C virus can lead to chronic liver inflammation. Serious scarring of the liver (cirrhosis) may result 20% to 30% of the time, and can lead to liver cancer or failure. People with signs of chronic hepatitis and significant liver scar tissue may be treated with medications. Several antiviral drugs are used in combination to clear the virus from the body. Blood tests can check the effectiveness of the medications. People who eradicate the virus for a long time are far less likely to develop liver cancer or failure.

When the liver becomes severely damaged and unable to function, a liver transplant may be an option. Medications are usually still necessary to keep the viral infection from returning.

*“Wellness is a connection of paths: knowledge and action.”*

– Unknown Author



Smart Moves toolkit is at [www.personalbest.com/extras/Feb14tools](http://www.personalbest.com/extras/Feb14tools).

**Next Month:** Love Your Vegetables