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Celebrate American Heart Month Together: Join the #OurHearts Movement

February is American Heart Month!

Did you know that people who have close relationships at home, work, or in their community tend to be healthier and live longer? One reason, according to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), is that we're more successful at meeting our health goals when we join forces with others. NHLBI launched the #OurHearts movement to inspire us to protect and strengthen our hearts with the support of others.

Here are some facts, how-to tips, and resources to inspire you to join with others to improve your heart health.

[Heart disease](#) is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. About 90 percent of middle-aged people and more than 74 percent of young adults have one or more risk factors for heart disease, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, or being a smoker or overweight. Having multiple risk factors increases your risk for heart disease.

Why Connecting is Good for Your Heart

Feeling connected with others and having positive, close relationships benefit our overall health, including our blood pressure and weight. Having people in our lives who motivate and care for us helps, as do feelings of closeness and companionship.

Follow these [heart healthy lifestyle tips](#) with your friends, family, coworkers, and others in your community and you'll all be heart healthier for it:

- Be more physically active.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a nutritious diet.
- Quit smoking.
- Reduce your stress.
- Get enough quality sleep.
- Track your heart health stats.

You don't have to make big changes all at once. Small steps will get you where you want to go.

Move More

Invite family, friends, colleagues, or members of your community to join you in your efforts to be more [physically active](#):

- Ask a colleague to walk with you on a regular basis, put the date on both your calendars, and text or call to make sure you both show up.

- Join an exercise class at your local community center and bring a neighbor along. Carpool or walk there together to make it a regular date.
- Grab your kids, put on music, and do jumping jacks, skip rope, or dance.
- Make your social time active and encourage everyone—family and friends alike—to think of fun activities that get you off the couch and moving.

How much is enough? Aim for at least 2½ hours of physical activity each week—that’s just 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. In addition, do muscle strengthening exercises 2 days a week. Can’t carve out a lot of time in your day? Don’t chuck your goal, chunk it! Try 10 or 15 minutes a few times a day. NHLBI’s [Move More fact sheet](#) provides ideas to get and keep you moving.

Aim for a healthy weight

Find someone in your friend group, at work, or in your family who also wants to reach or maintain a healthy weight. (If you’re overweight, even a small weight loss of 5–10 percent helps your health.) Check in with them regularly to stay motivated. Do healthy activities together, like walking or playing on a neighborhood sports team. Share low-calorie, low-sodium meals or recipes. Check out [NHLBI’s Aim for a Healthy Weight](#) web page.

Eat heart healthy

We tend to eat like our friends and family, so ask others close to you to join in your effort to eat healthier. Together, try NHLBI’s free [Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension \(DASH\)](#) eating plan. Research shows that, compared to a typical American diet, it lowers high blood pressure and improves blood cholesterol levels. Find delicious recipes at [NHLBI’s Heart Healthy Eating](#) web page.

Quit smoking

To help you quit, ask others for support or join a support group. Research shows that people are much more likely to quit if their spouse, friend, or sibling does. Social support online can also help you quit. All states have quit lines with trained counselors—call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). You’ll find many free resources to help you quit, such as apps, a motivational text service, and a chat line at [BeTobaccoFree.hhs.gov](#) and [Smokefree.gov](#).

If you need extra motivation to quit, consider those around you: Breathing other people’s smoke, called secondhand smoke, is dangerous. Thousands of adult *nonsmokers* die of stroke, heart disease, and lung cancer caused by secondhand smoke.

Manage stress

Reducing stress helps your heart health. Join with a friend or family member to do a relaxing activity every day, like walking, yoga, or meditation, or participate in a stress management program together. Physical activity also helps reduce stress. Talk to a qualified mental health provider or someone else you trust.

Improve sleep

Sleeping 7–8 hours a night helps to improve heart health. De-stressing will help you sleep, as does getting a 30-minute daily dose of sunlight. Take a walk instead of a late afternoon nap! Family members and friends: remind each other to turn off the screen and stick to a regular bedtime. Instead of watching TV before bed, relax by listening to music, reading, or taking a bath.

Track your heart health stats, together

Keeping a log of your blood pressure, weight goals, physical activity, and if you have diabetes, your blood sugars, will help you stay on a heart healthy track. Ask your friends or family to join you in the effort. Check out NHLBI's [Healthy Blood Pressure for Healthy Hearts: Tracking Your Numbers worksheet](#).

Visit [#OurHearts](#) for inspiration on what others around the country are doing together for their heart health. Then join the #OurHearts movement and let NHLBI know what you're doing with friends, family, or others to have a healthy heart. Tag #OurHearts to share how you're being heart healthy together.

[Article from: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#)