

5 steps to a healthier heart

Improving your heart's health may seem like a big project. But even small changes in your daily habits can make a difference. Here are 5 simple steps you can get started on right away.

1. Bring a piece of fruit to work.

Eating more fruits (and veggies) is a heart-healthy choice. Plus, many fruits are portable (think apples, oranges and bananas), which makes them an easy snack option. When hunger hits, having a piece of fruit at your work area will help you avoid less-healthy options from the vending machine.

2. Take a 10-minute walking break.

If you sit behind a computer most of the time, get up for a quick stroll several times a day. Sitting less and moving more is good for your ticker and your body overall. Keep in mind it's easier to fit in the recommended 30 minutes of movement every day if you divide the time into shorter bouts.

3. Give your screens an earlier bedtime.

Too little sleep can hurt your heart and increase your risk for other diseases, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes, which can also affect heart health. Watching TV or using your smartphone or computer close to bedtime can keep you awake.

Try giving yourself a deadline for turning off your screens an hour before bedtime every night.

4. Have a hearty laugh.

Laughter eases stress, which is a good thing



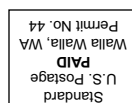
because too much stress may boost your risk for heart disease. For a regular dose of mirth, set aside time to watch some laugh-out-loud videos.

5. Compare food labels for sodium content.

Too much sodium can boost blood pressure, which is hard on your heart. Different brands of foods can have different sodium amounts. Take a moment to read

food labels and choose the brand with the least amount of sodium. Also take note of serving size. Some foods that don't have really high levels of sodium, like bread, are among the top sources of the mineral in the American diet—simply because we may eat several servings of them a day.

Sources: American Heart Association; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute



Your questions answered

What to know about cholesterol

You've probably heard of cholesterol. You may even know that it plays an important role in heart disease. Even so, many people may have questions about cholesterol and why they should pay attention to it. Do you? If so, here are some common questions and the answers.

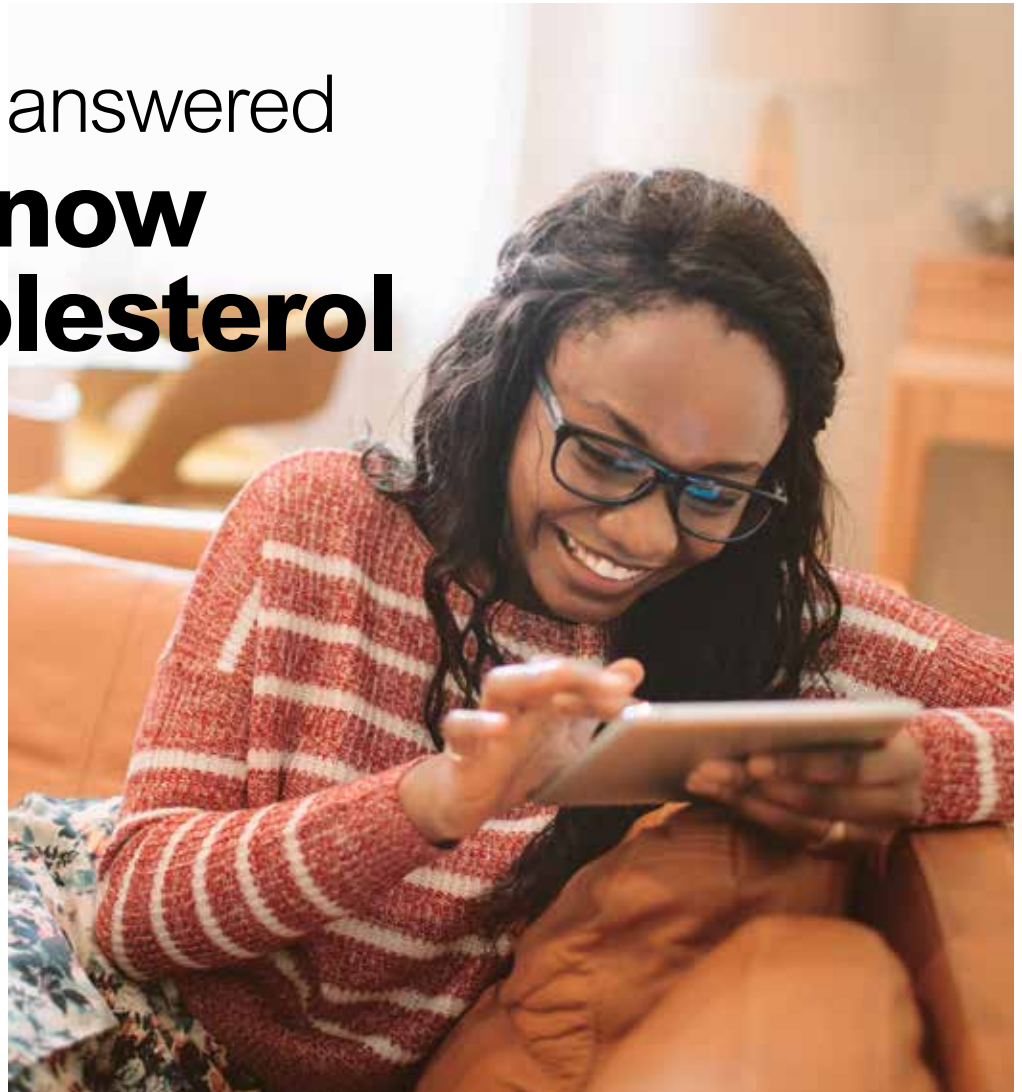
What is cholesterol? Cholesterol is a waxy substance that your body actually needs to function. But if too much of it builds up in your bloodstream, your health could suffer.

What causes high cholesterol? Your body makes some cholesterol. And cholesterol is found in animal-based foods, like meat and cheese. Foods high in saturated and trans fats can cause your liver to make more cholesterol than your body needs.

What do “bad” and “good” cholesterol mean? There are 2 main types of cholesterol:

- Low-density lipoprotein (LDL). This is often called the bad cholesterol because it tends to collect in arteries.
- High-density lipoprotein (HDL). This is often called the good cholesterol because it helps remove excess cholesterol from your arteries.

Over time, excess LDL cholesterol can combine with other substances in the blood and clog arteries that supply the heart and the brain with blood. As a result, those arteries may become stiff and narrow, and circulation may be decreased or become blocked. This



is commonly called hardening of the arteries. And it can lead to problems like heart disease, heart attack or a stroke.

HDL cholesterol plays an important role in heart disease in 2 ways: Having high blood levels can actually lower your risk of heart disease, but having too little can increase your risk.

How would I know if my cholesterol levels are within a healthy range? The only way to know is to get tested. The American Heart Association recommends that most adults have a cholesterol test—it's a simple blood test—at least every 4 to 6 years. Ask your doctor what's best for you.

How are unhealthy cholesterol levels treated?

If your cholesterol levels aren't what they should be, you may be able to improve them with some lifestyle changes. It helps to:

- Eat fewer foods high in saturated and trans fats, such as fatty meats and processed foods.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Get some exercise, such as brisk walking, at least 150 minutes a week.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

You also may need to take a cholesterol-lowering medicine, like a statin.

Additional sources: National Institutes of Health; U.S. National Library of Medicine

Eat smart for better blood pressure

How can you keep your blood pressure from creeping up? Or lower it if it's too high?

One of the best ways is to watch what you eat. Eating enough of some foods—and cutting back on others—can help you keep your blood pressure in a healthy range. And a healthy blood pressure level protects you from heart attacks and strokes.

Eat more:

Fruits and veggies, especially potassium-rich ones. They include:

- Leafy greens, such as spinach and collards.
- Fruit from vines, such as grapes and blackberries.
- Root vegetables, such as carrots and potatoes.
- Citrus fruits, such as oranges and grapefruit.

Whole grains, such as 100 percent whole-wheat pasta, cereal and bread. Enjoy brown rice and oatmeal too.

Low-fat or fat-free dairy products, such as milk, yogurt and cheese.



Nuts and legumes, such as peas, beans and lentils.

Nontropical vegetable oils, such as canola, olive or peanut oil.

Skinless poultry and fish.

Eat less:

- **Solid fats**, such as butter and lard.
- **Red meat**, such as beef and lamb.
- **Salty foods**, such as pizza, cold cuts, salty snacks, and olives and pickles.

● **Sugary foods**, such as sugary drinks, cakes, cookies and candy.

1 last tip

Finally, if your blood pressure is high, ask your doctor about the DASH diet. It's an eating plan that's been shown to bring blood pressure down over time.

Sources: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; American Heart Association; National Institutes of Health

The deal with unhealthy fats

Not all fats are bad. You've probably heard some are even good for you. But how can you tell?

Saturated and trans fats are unhealthy fats. An easy way to remember is that saturated and trans fats are often solid. Unhealthy fats are in butter, shortening and coconut oil. Meats like beef also have these fats.

Unsaturated fats are good fats that can lower your risk of heart disease.

They are usually liquid. You can find unsaturated fats in vegetable oil, nuts, seeds and avocados. Fish like salmon and tuna also have these fats.

Saturated and trans fats can raise your LDL, or bad, cholesterol. This can raise your risk of heart disease. Cutting down on these fats is good for your heart health.

SWAP OUT UNHEALTHY FATS

You can still enjoy many of your favorite snacks while avoiding unhealthy fats. For example, you can trade:

- Ice cream for low-fat frozen yogurt.

- A doughnut for a bagel.
- Potato chips for pretzels.
- Whole milk for fat-free or low-fat.

DINING OUT

You can make the upgrade at your favorite restaurants and fast-food places too. For instance, you can swap:

- French fries for a baked potato.
- Coleslaw for a salad.
- Fried chicken for grilled.
- A jumbo cheeseburger for a regular hamburger.

Sources: American Heart Association; U.S. Department of Agriculture



QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

How we improve your care

Contra Costa Health Plan's Quality Management (QM) Program always works to improve the care that our members get. One way we do that is by checking to see if our members are getting the right health checks at the right times. Also, we bring together teams to do Performance Improvement Projects. Their goal is to improve care. Right now we are working to improve care related to high blood pressure and to asthma.

The program also supports adults with diabetes and families with obese kids. We also look into problems with clinical care.

We ensure that members can get health education, translation and interpreters as needed.

To learn more about the program, please visit cchealth.org/healthplan/quality.php. Or call us at 925-313-6917, and we will send you a copy of the QM Program description.

HOW CCHP COMPARES TO SIMILAR HEALTH PLANS

Immunizations for children	Better
Care for pregnant women	Better
Well-child visits	About as good
Controlling high blood pressure	Better
Asthma care	Needs improvement

Advice Nurses and urgent care

If you are sick or hurt, you may need urgent care. That means you need quick care, but it's not an emergency. Not sure what kind of care you need? Call the Advice Nurse line.

We're here to help Contra Costa Health Plan (CCHP) members. We are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays. Just call 877-661-6230, option 1.

In order to decrease the time that you wait on the phone, we now offer 2 phone options.

Option 1: You may choose to leave a

message for the nurse to call you back.

Option 2: You can choose to have the phone system hold your place in line, and the system will call you back when a nurse is available to answer your questions.

When calling about your child, please make sure your child is with you at the time of your call. The Advice Nurse must be able to obtain the most up-to-date description of your child's symptoms to be able to safely refer your child to the appropriate level of care.

Depending on your symptoms, you may be eligible for the following:

- An urgent care visit.
- A telephone call with a CCHP doctor.
- An order for meds.
- Nurses can also give you advice on:
 - Questions on health care and meds.
 - Infectious disease exposure.
 - Caring for yourself or a family member.
 - If a visit to the emergency room is required.
 - Current vaccine info for you or your child.
 - Health resources in your community.
 - Contacting your doctor.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP Contra Costa Health Plan members. We are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays. Just call 877-661-6230, option 1.



Case managers

Guides for your good health

Call now

Get in touch with a case manager. Call **925-313-6887**.

- Please leave a message.
- Be sure to tell us what time we can reach you.
- We will return your call.
- You have the right to decline or stop this service at any time.

Would you like help with your health care needs? That's what our case managers do. We are a team of nurses and social workers. Our health care experts can help you get the care you need. They will work with you, your family and your doctor to improve your health. In addition, they can connect you to needed local resources. The service is free for Contra Costa Health Plan members. This service is offered over the phone.

Ask for a case manager if you have:

- A hard time getting to your doctor visits, taking your meds as you should or eating well.
- Gone to the emergency room a lot (more than 3 times this year).
- Gone to, or had to stay in, the hospital a lot (more than 2 times this year).
- Difficulty with stable housing, lack of transportation to get to medical appointments, lack of food, or another

situation that may hinder your health.

- Changes in your memory, mood, personality or behavior.
- Health issues that need to be watched closely.
- Any worries about caring for yourself or your loved ones.



New ID cards for members

Watch your mailbox! You can expect a new ID card soon. Why? We've made a small change to the pharmacy RxBin number. This number helps the pharmacy find the right info for medication claims.

When you receive your new card, be sure to destroy your old one. Take the new card to your pharmacy and provider offices so they can update their records.

You should get your new card by February 15. If it doesn't arrive? Go to our website, **contracostahealthplan.org**, to request one. Or call Member Services at **877-661-6230 (option 2)**.

IS YOUR INFO CURRENT?

If you have address or phone number changes, please tell us right away. That way you'll avoid delays getting your new card.

CalFresh: Get help paying for groceries

By Steven Courtney

Have you heard of CalFresh? This program used to be called Food Stamps. It helps close to 30,000 Contra Costa County families buy food every month. The benefit card works like a debit card. It can be used at many grocery and food stores in our county.

What can CalFresh benefits buy?

They CAN buy food, like:

- Breads and cereals.
- Fruits and vegetables.
- Meat and dairy.

They CANNOT buy:

- Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco.
- Any nonfood items.
- Prepared food or hot food from restaurants.

How can I sign up?

To learn about CalFresh, visit getcalfresh.org/s/fbccs. Or call the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano at **925-603-3316**.

You'll need certain documents. Those include:

- Identification.
- Proof of income.
- Proof of where you live (for example, a rental agreement or a letter from your landlord).
- Social Security number.
- Utility bills (if you pay utilities).

I have applied—what happens now?

An eligibility worker from the Contra Costa County Employment Human Services Department will contact you to set up a telephone interview. After the interview is complete and all necessary documents have been collected, a determination will be made within 30 days. If you are approved, you will receive your CalFresh benefit card by mail.





Please pass the potassium

It's hard to overstate all the good things potassium does for you.

This mineral helps your nerves work, your muscles contract and your heartbeat stay regular. It moves nutrients into cells and waste products out of them. And potassium helps keep your blood pressure in a healthy range by blunting the effects of sodium.

Are you coming up short?

Even though potassium is crucial for good health, chances are you're not getting enough of it. The average adult is encouraged to get 4,700 milligrams of potassium every day. But that's almost double what most of us actually consume, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

The good news: There are plenty of potassium-packed foods that can help you meet this daily amount. Among them:

- Dark green, leafy vegetables.
- Root vegetables.
- Bananas.

Consuming these foods and

beverages regularly can also up your intake:

- Apricots and apricot juice.
- Broccoli.
- Cantaloupes.
- Fat-free or low-fat milk and yogurt.
- Grapes.
- Certain fish, such as salmon, mackerel and halibut.
- Many types of beans, including black turtle, pinto, kidney, navy, great northern, lima and soybeans.
- Oranges and orange juice.
- Prunes, raisins and dates.
- Tomatoes, tomato juice and tomato sauce.

Easy does it

For some people, however, it is possible to get too much of a good thing. If you have kidney problems, for instance, your kidneys may not be able to remove potassium from your blood. And it can build up and be harmful. As a result, your doctor may advise a special diet to lower your potassium.

Additional sources: American Heart Association; National Institutes of Health; U.S. Department of Agriculture



CPR: You could save a life

When someone suddenly collapses in front of you, you might save their life if you know what to do. If a person is in cardiac arrest, seconds count. Don't be afraid to react.

First, get medical help. Call 911—or tell someone else to. Answer the dispatcher's questions the best you can. If you're using a mobile phone, be sure to give your location.

If the person is unresponsive, begin hands-only CPR.

HOW IT'S DONE

Hands-only CPR is simple and easy to remember:

- Place 1 hand palm down in the center of the person's chest. Place the heel of your other hand on top of the first.
- Lace your fingers together. Get in position so your shoulders are directly over your hands. Keep your arms out straight.
- Begin pushing. Push hard and fast. Use your body weight to push the person's chest down at least 2 inches.
- Push at the rate of 100 times per minute—about the speed of a pop song. Make sure the person's chest rises completely between pushes. Keep pushing until the person starts breathing or help arrives. If you get tired, let someone else take over.

Sources: American Heart Association; American Red Cross

Black Forest trifle

Makes 16 servings.

Ingredients

- 1 (9 ounce) package no-sugar-added low-fat chocolate cake mix
- 1 (4 ounce) package sugar-free instant chocolate pudding mix
- 2 cups fat-free milk
- 1 pound fresh, pitted, dark, sweet cherries or one 16-ounce package frozen, unsweetened, pitted, dark, sweet cherries (thawed and well-drained)
- 2 cups fat-free frozen whipped dessert topping, thawed
- Unsweetened cocoa powder (optional)

Preparation: 30 minutes

- Prepare cake mix according to package directions using an 8-inch square or round cake pan. If desired, line cake pan with parchment paper; continue as directed. Cool cake in pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes; remove cake from pan and remove parchment if used. Cut cake into 1-inch pieces.
- Meanwhile, prepare pudding mix according to package directions using the 2 cups fat-free milk; cover and chill about 30 minutes or until set.
- Place half of the cake cubes in a 3-quart trifle bowl. Spoon half of the cherries over cake; spread half of the pudding over cherries and top with half of the whipped topping. Repeat layers. If desired, sprinkle with cocoa powder.



Nutrition information

Serving size: 2/3 cup. Per serving: 102 calories; 1g fat (0g saturated fat); 1g fiber; 22g carbohydrates; 3g protein; 3mcg folate; 1mg cholesterol; 6g sugars; 81 IU vitamin A; 2mg vitamin C;

48mg calcium; 1mg iron; 110mg sodium; 141mg potassium.

Carbohydrate servings: 1½

Exchanges: 1½ other carbohydrate

Source: eatingwell.com © Meredith Corporation. All rights reserved. Used with permission. EatingWell magazine and EatingWell.com