Small Changes Make a Big Difference
Lifestyle changes for your heart
Heart disease is the leading cause of death for Americans.

The good news is that there are a lot of things you can do to lower your risk. This booklet includes tips to lower your risk of heart disease with diet and other lifestyle changes.
Are You at Risk for Heart Disease?

Some things increase your risk of heart disease. Your risk is higher if you have two or more of the factors below.

**Risk factors you can change** (check off your risks):

- High LDL (“bad”) cholesterol (more than 100 mg/dL)
- Low HDL (“good”) cholesterol
- High triglycerides
- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Lack of exercise
- Obesity
- Unhealthy diet (high in added sugars, salt, red and processed meats, and refined grains such as white flour or white rice)

**Risk factors you cannot change:**

- Family history of early heart disease (female family member before 65 years old; male family member before 55)
- Age (male over 45; female over 55)
- Being male
What Can You Do to Lower Your Risk?

You can make a difference!

• You can lower your risk of heart disease by making positive lifestyle changes. This booklet gives you important guidelines to follow to improve your eating habits. Other lifestyle changes can also help you lower your risk and manage other risk factors, such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

• If you smoke, quit. Kaiser Permanente offers many resources for support (see the Resources page in this booklet).

• Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise, such as brisk walking, 5 days a week. See page 9 for more information. Learn about our Wellness Coaching by Phone programs to help you get started (see the Resources page in this booklet).
Change the Foods You Eat to Lower Your Cholesterol and Your Risk of Heart Disease

Just a few small changes to what you eat each day can help lower your risk of heart disease and lower your cholesterol. Making small changes to problem areas in your diet may help you cut back on medications with your doctor’s help.

The changes listed below can lower inflammation in your body, your cholesterol, and your risk of a heart attack.

Here are the most important changes you can make:

- **Eat more whole foods,** especially vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Aim for 5 or more servings of vegetables and 2 to 3 servings of fruit a day. Eat more beans, lentils, and whole grains.
- **Eat fatty fish** such as salmon, trout, tuna, herring, and mackerel at least 2 times a week.
- **Use small amounts of extra virgin olive oil and canola oil** instead of other fats and oils.
- **Decrease saturated fat** by limiting fatty meats and 2% or whole-fat dairy.
- **Avoid trans fat** (partially hydrogenated oil). Trans fat can be found in microwave popcorn, baking mixes, biscuits, and other baked goods. See the shopping section on page 7 for label-reading tips.
- **Limit red meat** (beef, pork, and lamb) to just a few times a month. Choose chicken, turkey, beans, lentils, and tofu instead.
- **Cut back on added sugars and sodium.** Limit added sugars to no more than 25 g or less per day. Limit sodium to 2,300 mg or less per day.
THE HEALTHY PLATE

One easy way to choose healthier foods is to use the healthy plate method. It helps you portion your foods in a healthy way and makes meal planning easier. Portions are based on a small dinner plate.

Fill one-quarter of your plate with a healthy protein source, such as fish, chicken, eggs, cooked beans, lentils, or tofu.

Fill one-quarter of your plate with healthy grains or starches, such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, quinoa, bulgur, corn, peas, barley, farro, amaranth, one slice of whole-grain bread, two corn tortillas, or one whole-wheat tortilla.

Fill half of your plate with nonstarchy vegetables, such as carrots, broccoli, spinach, cabbage, green beans, peppers, zucchini, onions, greens, tomatoes, or romaine lettuce.

For good nutrition also choose each day:

- 3 fruit servings. A serving is a small orange, banana, or apple, or 1 cup of berries or melon.
- 2 to 3 cups of nonfat or low-fat milk or yogurt or plant milks.
- A small amount of healthy fats, such as extra virgin olive or canola oil, or a small handful of nuts.
Getting Started

Step 1: Turn to the TARGET FOODS CHART in the back of the booklet. Your main goals are listed under WHERE TO START.

Step 2: As you read through the foods listed under CHOOSE MORE OFTEN, circle the foods that you would like to eat.

Step 3: Look through the list of foods under the CHOOSE LESS OFTEN column for foods to avoid.

Step 4: Now you are ready to complete your plan on the TARGET FOODS CHART.

Under the column CHANGES I AM WILLING TO MAKE, write down changes you will make. How will your breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snacks be different? How about eating out?

Remember that you have choices when changing your eating habits. You can choose to:

- Find a substitute.
- Change how often you eat a food.
- Change how much you eat.

It may be helpful to put your TARGET FOODS CHART in a spot you see often to remind yourself of the changes you will make. Be patient but persistent. For example, it may take 1 to 3 months to see your blood cholesterol level drop. How much it drops will depend on how high in saturated and trans fat and added sugars your diet is now, how many changes you make, and how your body responds to your new diet.

Remember that these dietary changes can help to lower your risk of heart disease even if your blood cholesterol levels stay the same!
Suggestions for Choosing Healthier Foods

TRANS FAT: A note of caution
The Nutrition Facts section on a label can say a food has 0 grams of trans fat, but it actually may have more. Read the ingredients list, too. Avoid foods with the words “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” oils in the list. Aim for zero grams of trans fat a day.

SODIUM
If you have high blood pressure, eating less sodium has been shown to lower blood pressure after only a few weeks. Even if you do not have high blood pressure, having less sodium each day can lower your risk of a heart attack or stroke.
The average American has 3,500 to 5,000 mg of sodium a day, with a surprising 80 percent coming from restaurant food, fast food, and processed foods—not the salt shaker.
Your goal is no more than 2,300 mg of sodium a day.
What can you do to lower the amount of sodium you eat?

- **Eat out less often.** Aim for only 1 or 2 times a week.
- **Cook at home.** Make extra and eat the leftovers for lunch.
- **Eat fewer processed,** packaged, and canned foods.
- **Read the Nutrition Facts labels** of foods you eat often to see how much sodium you are getting.
- **Eat more fresh foods,** such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, peas, lentils, fish, and chicken.
- **Cut the amount of salt you add while cooking** in half until you are not adding much, if any. Use herbs, spices, lemon juice, vinegar, balsamic vinegar, garlic, onions, wine, dry mustard, or herb blends instead.
- **Cut the amount of salt you add at the table** in half until you are not using any at all.

Your taste buds will get used to the lower amount of sodium in just 3 to 4 weeks.

**SHOPPING**

- **Read labels.** Use the Nutrition Facts to compare similar products. Check the serving size, sodium, and amount and type of fat.
- **Limit foods that list these ingredients:** partially hydrogenated oil (trans fat), coconut oil, palm kernel oil, vegetable shortening, lard, sugar, corn syrup, honey, molasses, agave nectar.
- **Buy fresh foods when you can.** Processed foods (packaged, canned, boxed) have more unhealthy fat, sodium, and sugar.
- **Try not to shop when you’re hungry.**
- **Shop from a list.** Use the **TARGET FOODS CHART** to make healthy choices.
EATING OUT

Choose restaurants with varied menus so you have a lot of options. Ask how foods are prepared and ask for changes if needed.

- **Plan your meal using the healthy plate.** See page 4 for details.
- **Order broiled, baked, or poached foods** or foods cooked in canola or olive oil. Trim all fat from meats and remove skin from poultry before eating.
- **Avoid fried foods.**
- Order butter, gravy, sauces, and salad dressings (such as blue cheese and Thousand Island) **on the side and limit the amount you use.**
- **At the salad bar, choose fresh vegetables, fruit, and beans.** Take only small amounts of high-fat foods such as coleslaw, pasta salad, and potato salad. Use olive or canola oil-based salad dressings on the side. Skip the cheese, fatty meats, and croutons.
- **Think small.** Split a main dish or ask for a to-go bag at the start of the meal.
- **Order fresh fruit for dessert.** It may not be listed on the menu but you can ask for it.
- **Order a la carte.** If you order a complete meal, you are paying for food you may not want or need.
Exercise

Being more active is great for your overall health. Exercise has many benefits:

• Lowers your risk of heart disease
• Lowers blood pressure
• Lowers the risk of breast and colon cancer
• Helps prevent diabetes
• Lowers the risk of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia
• Helps your mood and energy level
• Helps control weight
• Improves sleep

Work up to at least 30 minutes of aerobic activity on 5 days a week or more. You can also do two 15-minute or three 10-minute sessions in a day. Start out slowly to give your muscles a chance to warm up. Slow your pace at the end for a 5- to 10-minute cooldown.
Types of aerobic activity:

- Brisk walking
- Chair exercise
- Jogging
- Swimming
- Hiking
- Water aerobics
- Tai chi
- Biking
- Dancing
- Basketball
- Tennis

Aim for a moderate level of intensity. You are at the right intensity if it is hard enough to make you breathe deeply and sweat a little, but easy enough to talk.

If you are not exercising now, start at a low level and work your way up. If you have a health condition, talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program.

On Your Way

You’re on your way to making some important changes to your eating and other lifestyle habits that will lower your risk of heart disease. Put your TARGET FOODS CHART in a place you see often to remind yourself of the changes you will make.

If you want more help or have questions, contact your local Kaiser Permanente Center for Healthy Living (kp.org/centerforhealthyliving) for workshops or to speak with a registered dietitian. You can also learn more online at kp.org/heart.

You’re already on your way to a healthier life!
Other lifestyle changes you are willing to make to lower your risk:

I will . . .

☐ Quit smoking.

☐ Exercise (such as brisk walking) at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.

☐ Take a Kaiser Permanente workshop to help manage my diabetes, heart health, or weight. (Visit kp.org/centerforhealthyliving for information.)
Resources

If you smoke, quitting the habit is the most important step you can take toward decreasing your risk for heart attack and stroke.

**Wellness Coaching by Phone:** If you need support to quit tobacco, manage your weight, get active, reduce stress, or eat healthy, you can work with your own personal wellness coach on the phone to set goals for healthy, lasting change. Together, you and your coach will build a plan of action tailored just for you. Available in English and Spanish at no charge to Kaiser Permanente members. To schedule a phone appointment, call at 1-866-862-4295 Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. (PT).

**In person:** Get support from your peers as you set a quit date and discuss successful, easy techniques to stay quit. Visit [kp.org/centerforhealthyliving](https://kp.org/centerforhealthyliving) to find a workshop near you.

**Online:** Check [kp.org/breathe](https://kp.org/breathe) for a personalized online program designed to help you quit.

More resources, tools, and tips: [kp.org/quitsmoking](https://kp.org/quitsmoking)
### TARGET FOODS CHART

**STEP 1** Where to start
**Eat more plant-based whole foods.**

- **Eat less red meat (beef, pork, lamb)** (only two times a month).
- **Eat fish, chicken, beans, and tofu instead.**

**Choose healthy fats and oils.**
**Limit saturated fat.**
**Avoid trans (partially hydrogenated) fats.**
**Limit added sugar.**

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**STEP 2** Choose more often
**Fruits and Vegetables**
- Eat at least 5 servings of fresh vegetables and 2-3 fresh fruits a day. One serving is ½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw.

- **Whole Grains, Legumes, Nuts, and Seeds**
  - Brown rice, quinoa, bulgur, whole-grain breads and cereals, whole-wheat pasta
  - Dried beans, peas, lentils, and soy products
  - Old-fashioned nut butters (limit to 2 tablespoons a day)
  - Nuts and seeds such as walnuts and flaxseeds as a garnish (limit to 2 tablespoons a day)

- **Poultry, Seafood, and Other Protein Sources**
  - 4–6 ounces a day
  - Eat at least 2 servings of fatty fish such as salmon a week
  - Chicken or turkey without the skin, shellfish, tuna in water
  - Tofu, cooked beans and peas, such as kidney, pinto, garbanzo, black beans, split peas, and lentils

**Fats and Oils**
- 3–7 teaspoons a day
  - Olive or canola oil, trans-fat-free margarine, liquid margarine
  - Nonstick cooking spray
  - Avocados, olives
  - Fat-free or low-fat mayonnaise, a small amount of regular mayonnaise, fat-free or low-fat salad dressing, vinaigrette, olive or canola oil-based dressing, flavored vinegars, lemon juice, lime juice, salsa
  - Reduced-fat or fat-free cream cheese or sour cream
  - Fat-free coffee creamers or 1% milk

**Dairy Products**
- Fat-free or 1% low-fat milk or yogurt, or soy milk
- Reduced-fat or fat-free cheese (including cottage cheese or ricotta)
- Eggs whites or egg substitute (limit egg yolks to 4 a week)

**Snack Foods**
- Fresh fruit and vegetables; whole-grain pretzels; air-popped or light popcorn; fat-free or low-fat whole-grain crackers; a handful of nuts

**Desserts**
- Fresh fruit
- Pureed frozen fruit; fat-free, low-fat, or light frozen yogurt; fat-free, low-sugar ice cream; sorbet; sherbet; sugar-free Popsicles

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**STEP 3** Choose less often
**Fruits and Vegetables**
- Vegetables with cheese sauces and fruits with added sugars

- **Whole Grains, Legumes, Nuts, and Seeds**
  - White bread, bagels, doughnuts, pastries, muffins, croissants, biscuits
  - Nut butters with added oil and sugar, larger amounts of nuts and seeds or nut butters
  - Processed foods (canned, packaged, boxed)

- **Poultry, Seafood, and Other Protein Sources**
  - Processed meat such as sausage, bacon, hot dogs, lunch meats, fried chicken, fried fish
  - Beef, pork, or lamb
  - Organ meats (liver, heart, kidney, sweetbreads, brains)

**Fats and Oils**
- Butter, stick margarine, shortening, lard, salt pork, bacon grease, coconut oil, palm oil, partially hydrogenated oils
- Blue cheese, ranch, or Thousand Island salad dressing, mayonnaise
- Cream cheese, sour cream, half and half
- Coffee creamers (liquid or powder)

**Dairy Products**
- Whole or 2% milk or yogurt
- Whole-milk cheeses (cheddar, Swiss, jack, American)
- Whole eggs

**Snack Foods**
- Potato, corn, or tortilla chips; cheese puffs; pop-corn; crackers; granola

**Desserts**
- Cakes, pies, cookies
- Ice cream, milkshakes, smoothies

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**STEP 4** Changes I am willing to make

- **Example:** Bring fruit to work for a snack or keep fresh fruit at my desk.

- **Example:** Try adding walnuts to cereal or salad.

- **Example:** Try one meatless, cheeseless meal, such as soup or chili, once a week.

- **Examples:** Use fat-free milk on cereal. Use one whole egg and two egg whites for scrambled eggs.

- **Example:** Switch to carrots with hummus instead of chips and dip.