

# My recovery

- ▶ This section tells you how you can take charge and take steps towards a positive recovery.
- ▶ Information is included about the first steps for recovery and ways to reduce your risk of more heart problems.





### ► Checklist: Take charge of your recovery

- Set recovery goals and priorities for working on your emotional and physical health.
- See your doctor regularly.
- Take your medicines as directed.
- Start and complete your cardiac rehabilitation.

## Set goals and priorities for your health

Work with health professionals to set goals and priorities for making lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, losing weight or eating healthier foods.

### Remember:

- you may be more successful if you focus on one goal at a time
- your doctor, cardiologist or cardiac rehabilitation team member can help you set priorities
- don't give up.

Discuss these health goals with your health professionals:

- if you smoke, aim to quit
- if you have high cholesterol and/or high blood pressure, aim to lower them to the targets set with your doctor
- if you have diabetes, work with your doctor to manage it
- if you are overweight, aim to reach a healthy weight and maintain it

- eat healthy foods
- be more physically active and try to reduce the amount of time spent sitting
- manage your emotional health.

This section provides more information on improving your health.

## See your doctor regularly

See your doctor as soon as you can after leaving hospital. You will manage your health better with regular check-ups.

Take your medicines list, discharge information or any test results. These tell your doctor about your medicines and doses. Your doctor may already have this information from the hospital.

## Care for your wounds

If you had surgery or a procedure, you need to look after your wounds so they heal well. Follow the doctor's or hospital instructions. See your doctor if you notice any unusual pain or tenderness in your chest or signs of infection (e.g. increased soreness, oozing, bleeding, a bad smell or a high temperature).

To help your wounds heal:

- eat a balanced healthy diet
- quit smoking
- avoid straining activities as this could damage the wound, or cause other problems
- follow advice about managing pain and exercising from your doctor, physiotherapist or cardiac rehabilitation team.

## Take your medicines

Talk with your doctor about medicines. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You need to understand the benefits, how and when to take your medication, and what the side effects might be.

Take your medicines exactly as directed. Try not to miss a dose. Don't stop taking them just because you feel better.

See pages 27–34 for more information about medicines.

Call the  
Medicines Line  
on 1300 633 424  
for consumer  
advice on  
medicines

## Attend your cardiac rehabilitation

Cardiac rehabilitation will help you to get back on track. Ask your doctor/nurse about a referral to a cardiac rehabilitation program.

It includes important information, social support and a physical activity program. It will also help you to make lifestyle changes and reduce your risk of more heart problems.

See pages 35–37 for more information about cardiac rehabilitation.



## Getting back to normal

You should be able to return to your normal activities a few weeks after your heart attack or surgery. Talk to your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team about when you can start different activities again and how to pace your recovery.

For more advice about starting physical activity see pages 71–72.

### Going back to work

Returning to work is a very important part of your recovery. The earlier you plan for it, the better your chances of getting back sooner.

Decide with your doctor, cardiac rehabilitation team and other health professionals when to go back to your job. They will tell you how to prepare for returning, and the type of activities that will best help your recovery.

You can usually go back to work a few weeks after you go home from hospital. But this depends on how fast you recover and how physically active your job is. Your workplace may have a Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator who can help.

If you do physically demanding work, you may need to build up your strength first. Think about asking your workplace for lighter duties or shorter work hours or days.

Whatever your job, make sure you are physically and emotionally ready to go back. Give yourself time to settle into your work routine again.

**Talk to your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team about when you can get back to normal activities.**



## Travelling

Most patients can travel straightaway by train, tram or bus, or as a passenger in a car. If you are traveling on public transport, make sure you have a seat, so you don't get too tired. If you have had heart surgery, discuss using public transport with your doctor.

Long trips may make you feel tired, so try to have regular breaks. If you have had bypass surgery, placing a cushion, pillow or rolled-up towel between your chest and the seat belt may help to reduce pressure on the wound while it heals.

Check with your doctor if you can travel by plane. You may also need to get medical clearance. Ask the airline about any air travel requirements if you're unsure. Travel insurance coverage can be affected by your heart condition. The insurance company may require a medical assessment and there may be extra costs or exclusions on your cover. Talk with your doctor before buying travel insurance.

## Driving

Driving a motor vehicle is a complex task and driver health and fitness to drive is important. A heart attack and heart surgery can affect short-term driving capacity as well as long-term licensing status. Always talk with your doctor before you start driving again.

The following are suggested minimum times to wait before you begin driving a private car again:

- coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery – at least four weeks
- heart attack (myocardial infarction) – at least two weeks
- coronary angioplasty and stent insertion – at least two days.



Your car insurance might not cover you if you start driving sooner than the recommended waiting time. Check with your insurance company.

By law you must report a permanent or long-term illness that might affect your driving. To check if you should report your condition, contact the Transport Authority in your state or territory. They may also set some conditions you must meet to make sure you can drive safely.

If you drive a commercial vehicle (e.g. a truck or forklift), there are longer waiting times. There are also different conditions you need to meet.

Some medicines can affect your ability to drive. Ask your doctor about the side effects of your medicines. This is very important if you drive a commercial vehicle.

If you feel insecure or your family is worried about you driving:

- don't drive alone
- only drive routes you know
- avoid peak hour traffic.

### **Intimacy and having sex**

Most people can have sex again soon after a heart attack or other heart problems.

The exertion during sexual activity can be similar to mild to moderate physical activity – such as brisk walking or climbing up two flights of stairs. As a general guide, if you can do physical activity at this level without getting chest pain or short of breath, you are probably fit enough to resume sexual activity.

If you have had heart surgery, wait until your breastbone has healed (about six to eight weeks after the operation). Do not put any pressure or stress on your chest. Some positions may be more comfortable than others.



Stop having sex if you experience the warning signs of a heart attack. If you are short of breath, have chest pain or even discomfort in your chest during or after sex, you should consult your doctor.

Try not to have sex after eating a large meal, drinking alcohol or when you are very tired.

You may notice changes in your sexual interest or ability. This is common and is usually short-term.

Reasons can include tiredness, depression, anxiety, concerns about physical ability and the effect of your medicines.

Take things slowly. It can take time for a sexual relationship to get back to normal. It's important to remember that intimacy is not just the act of sexual intercourse. It is about feeling connected and close to someone; and feeling loved for who you are. Kissing, cuddling, kind words, hand holding, and togetherness are all important ways to be close to each other. This will increase your feelings of intimacy. Talk with your partner or doctor about your feelings and any concerns you may have about having sex.

If you think your medicines are affecting your sexual desire or ability, talk to your doctor. Do not stop taking your medicines without checking with your doctor. Nitrate medicines can interact with erectile dysfunction medications (see page 34 for more information).

## Eat healthy foods

Healthy eating and drinking is an important part of looking after your health. Eating healthy foods will help you recover, make you feel better and reduce your risk of more heart problems.

Healthy eating is easier than you think. You can usually find all the foods you need at your local supermarket. You just need to know what foods to buy to make healthier meals.

### Our recommended goals

- Eat vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, nuts and seeds every day.
- Choose lean meats and poultry including fish and seafood.
- Choose reduced fat dairy such as unflavoured milk, yoghurt and cheese.
- Choose healthier fats including nuts, seeds, avocados, olives and their oils for cooking.
- Use herbs and spices to flavour foods, instead of salt.
- Make water the drink of choice.

For healthier recipes see  
[heartfoundation.org.au/recipes](http://heartfoundation.org.au/recipes)

- **Healthy eating and drinking will help you recover and avoid more heart problems.**
- **Some simple changes can make a big difference.**
- **Talk to your doctor or dietitian about the diet that is best for you.**
- **Use the action plan on page 116 to make some changes.**



### ► Healthy eating

- Eat plenty of vegetables (aim for five serves every day) and fruit (aim for two serves every day).
- Choose wholegrain types of breads, cereal, pasta, rice and noodles.
- Eat a variety of nuts and seeds.
- Select lean meat (meat trimmed of fat and poultry without skin)
- Have two to three serves (150 g) of fish and seafood every week (fresh, frozen or canned).
- Include legumes in at least two meals a week (e.g. lentils, split peas, dried or canned beans like four bean mix, or baked beans).
- Eat up to 6 eggs a week.
- Choose reduced fat milk, yoghurt and cheese
- Use healthier fats and oils for cooking, spread and dressings. Some suitable choices include canola, sunflower, soybean, olive, sesame and peanut oils.
- Make water your drink of choice.

Talk to your doctor or dietitian about the diet that is best for you.

## What about fat?

If you have coronary heart disease, you need to be careful about the foods you eat.

It's important to change the types of fat you eat. Eating too much unhealthy saturated and trans fats can increase cholesterol. Choosing foods with healthier fats can help you lower your cholesterol and avoid more heart problems.

### Saturated fats

Saturated fats raise cholesterol. To keep your cholesterol level low, it's important to eat fewer foods that are high in saturated fats.

### Trans fats

Trans fats raise your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) 'bad' cholesterol and lower your high-density lipoprotein (HDL) 'good' cholesterol.

Trans fats are in commercially baked products (pies, pastries, cakes and biscuits). It's best to avoid these foods. Trans fats are also found naturally in small amounts in dairy products, beef, veal, lamb and mutton.

### Polyunsaturated fats

Polyunsaturated fats help to lower high cholesterol. Some oils, margarine spreads, nuts, seeds and fish contain polyunsaturated fats.



### Monounsaturated fats

Monounsaturated fats also help to lower cholesterol. There are monounsaturated fats in some oils, margarine spreads, avocado, nuts and seeds.

### Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 fatty acids can improve your outcomes after a heart attack and can help manage your triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood). Many fish and some types of seafood are good sources of Omega-3. All Australians should aim to include 2–3 serves of fish or seafood per week as part of a healthy diet.

#### ► Reduce unhealthy fats and replace them with healthier fats

- Choose lean cuts of meat or trim all the fat you can see before cooking. Remove skin from chicken before cooking.
- Eat fish instead of meat 2–3 times a week, and choose legume or bean-based meals twice a week.
- Consume nuts and seeds daily.
- Choose reduced fat unflavoured milk, cheese and yoghurt.
- Choose healthy fats with nuts, seeds, avocados, olives and their oils for cooking.
- Minimise consumption of processed meats (eg. sausages and salami), bought cakes, biscuits and pastries, and take-away foods like hamburgers, pizza and hot chips.

## What about salt?

Salt is hidden in lots of food. The amount of salt you eat should be less than 4 g per day. That's less than a teaspoon. Salt holds fluid in your body. If you eat too much salt, the extra water stored in your body raises your blood pressure.

Salt is made up of sodium and chloride. It's the sodium that can be bad for your health, and it is listed on food packages.

### Some salty foods include:

- commercially baked products like biscuits, pastries, cakes and breads
- processed meat, such as ham, bacon, sausages, hot dogs, tinned meat, corned meat and pies
- take-away foods, such as hamburgers, pizza, hot chips, noodles, potato chips, many Asian foods, pasta and fried chicken
- packaged foods, such as tinned and instant soup, fish in brine and instant noodles
- condiments and sauces like packet seasoning, stock cubes, soy sauce and tomato sauce
- snack foods like salted nuts, olives and dips.



### ▶ Reduce your salt intake

- Make fresh foods the main part of your diet – include a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, lean meat, poultry and fish, reduced fat dairy, plain unsalted nuts and seeds and legumes.
- Use lemon juice, garlic, herbs and spices to add flavour whilst cooking rather than adding salt whilst cooking.
- Remove the salt shaker from the table to avoid adding salt as a habit.
- Use the salt and sodium converter on the Heart Foundation website to understand the salt content of your food.

# How to make healthier meals

There are two easy ways to change your favourite recipes to reduce the energy (kilojoules) or saturated fat content. You can try healthier cooking methods, and reduce, replace or remove the less healthy ingredients.



## Healthier cooking methods

Method	Try these healthier ingredients or cooking methods
<b>Deep-fry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roast in the oven on a lined tray or grill tray.</li> <li>• Lightly steam or microwave food before roasting.</li> <li>• Brush food with canola, sunflower, soybean or olive oil to make it crisp.</li> <li>• Cook crumbed fish, chicken and oven fries in the oven instead of deep-frying them.</li> </ul>
<b>Shallow-fry/Sauté</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stir-fry food using a spray of canola, sunflower, soybean, olive or peanut oil so you use less oil.</li> <li>• Use a non-stick frying pan so you use less oil.</li> </ul>
<b>Roast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose lean cuts of meat or trim all visible fat.</li> <li>• Put meat on a rack in a baking dish with 1 to 2 cm water. Add herbs to the water for extra flavour.</li> <li>• Brush meat with a marinade to stop it drying out. Try covering it with a lid or aluminium foil for part of the cooking time.</li> <li>• Roast meat on a spit or rotisserie and let the fat drip away.</li> <li>• Brush or spray vegetables with canola, sunflower, soybean, olive or peanut oil, and bake them in a separate pan from meat.</li> </ul>
<b>Casserole/Stew</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trim fat off meat before cooking.</li> <li>• Add legumes for extra fibre and flavour (e.g. kidney beans, chickpeas, soybeans or lentils).</li> <li>• After cooking, chill the food so the fat becomes solid on the surface. Skim the fat off before reheating and thickening.</li> </ul>

## Healthier ingredients

Ingredient	Try these healthier alternatives
<b>Milk/Yoghurt/ Cream</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use reduced fat varieties. Plain yoghurt is best as many flavoured products are high in sugar.</li><li>• Use ricotta cheese whipped with a little icing sugar, fruit or reduced fat milk instead of cream.</li></ul>
<b>Sour cream</b>	Replace sour cream with one of these options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• cottage cheese blended with reduced fat milk – add a little lemon juice or vinegar to make it more ‘sour’ (acidic) if you like</li><li>• reduced fat natural yoghurt</li><li>• evaporated reduced fat milk mixed with lemon juice.</li></ul>
<b>Cheese</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use smaller amounts of reduced fat cheese instead of full fat cheese.</li><li>• Use a little grated parmesan cheese instead of grated cheddar – it gives more flavour and you don’t need to use as much.</li><li>• Mix grated reduced fat cheese with oats, breadcrumbs or wheatgerm to make toppings for casseroles, gratins and baked dishes.</li></ul>
<b>Butter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instead of butter, use spreads like avocado, nut butters or tahini.</li></ul>
<b>Oil</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a variety of oils for cooking.</li><li>• Suitable cooking oils include canola, sunflower, soybean, olive and peanut oil.</li></ul>
<b>Dressing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use salad dressings made from canola, sunflower, soybean and olive oil.</li><li>• Make your own salad dressing. Use ingredients such as reduced fat yoghurt, tomato paste, balsamic or other vinegars, lemon juice, ricotta cheese, mustard or fruit pulp.</li></ul>

Ingredient	Try these healthier alternatives
<b>Meat/Poultry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose lean meats and poultry.</li> <li>• Remove all visible fat from meat and skin from poultry before cooking.</li> <li>• Marinate or add flavour with ingredients such as wine vinegars.</li> <li>• Sear meat quickly to keep in juices.</li> </ul>
<b>Cake/Biscuit ingredients</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cook with spreads made from canola, sunflower or olive oil instead of butter.</li> <li>• Cook with canola, sunflower or olive oil.</li> <li>• The minimum fat required for biscuits is about 2 tablespoons per cup of flour – this will keep biscuits crisp.</li> <li>• Make plain sponges, yeast cakes, breads, muffins and scones because they generally use less fat.</li> <li>• Use wholegrain or wholemeal flour to add some extra fibre.</li> </ul>
<b>Pastry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use filo pastry. Brush every three to four layers with canola, sunflower, soybean or olive oil, egg white or reduced fat yoghurt.</li> <li>• Use pastry made with canola, sunflower or olive oil.</li> </ul>
<b>Coconut cream/ Coconut milk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add a little coconut essence to evaporated reduced fat milk.</li> <li>• Soak desiccated coconut in warm reduced fat milk for 30 minutes. Strain the mixture, discard the coconut and use the milk.</li> <li>• Occasionally, use a reduced fat coconut milk.</li> </ul>

## How to choose healthy foods and drinks

Small changes can make a big difference! Think about what changes you can make to the foods you eat, and the way you prepare and cook them, to make them healthier.

One small change	Less healthy choices	Kilojoule (kj) content	Healthier choices	Kilojoule (kj) content
Go for a healthier snack	1 cinnamon doughnut (70 g)	1102	1 medium banana (150 g)	377
	1 packet potato crisps (50 g)	1080	1 medium apple (150 g)	374
	2 chocolate coated cream-filled biscuits	776	2 plain sweet biscuits	316
	1 chocolate bar with biscuit and caramel (50 g)	1020	Small handful of raw almonds (20 g)	516
Choose light/reduced alcohol drinks	1 glass dry white wine (100 mL)	295	1 glass reduced alcohol white wine (100 mL)	173
	1 can full strength beer (375 mL)	572	1 can light beer (375 mL)	390
Change what you put on your veggies	1 large corn cob with 2 tsp butter	1012	1 large corn cob, steamed	764
	½ cup green beans (60 g) with 1 tsp butter	177	½ cup green beans, steamed (60 g)	53
	1 medium baked potato with 1 tbsp sour cream	769	1 medium baked potato with 1 tbsp low fat natural yoghurt	542

One small change	Less healthy choices	Kilojoule (kJ) content	Healthier choices	Kilojoule (kJ) content
Go for leaner meats	1 medium T-bone steak, fat untrimmed	2263	1 medium T-bone steak, fat removed	1388
	Regular beef mince (100 g)	1185	Extra lean beef mince (100 g)	849
	Roasted chicken breast with skin (100 g)	781	Roasted chicken breast without skin (100 g)	637
	1 meat pie (175 g)	1650	Ham and salad sandwich	876
	Hungarian salami (30 g)	535	Lean leg ham (30 g)	140
Use a different cooking method	1 fish fillet, battered and fried (150 g)	1649	1 fish fillet, grilled (150 g)	792
	Chicken parmigiana	3648	Stir-fried chicken breast, without skin (100 g)	671
	French fries (90 g)	1217	Potato wedges, oven baked (90 g)	706
Switch to low fat dairy	Cappuccino with full cream milk (1 cup)	552	Cappuccino with skim milk (1 cup)	291
	Extra creamy vanilla ice cream (100 g)	956	Low fat vanilla ice cream (100 g)	638
	Regular fat berry yoghurt (200 g)	802	Low fat natural yoghurt (200 g)	482
	2 breakfast wheat biscuits (30 g) + 2/3 cup full fat milk	934	2 breakfast wheat biscuits (30 g) + 2/3 cup skim milk	698
Swap sugary drinks	1 glass cola soft drink (250 mL)	437	1 glass unflavoured mineral water (250 mL)	0
	1 glass orange juice (250 mL)	305	1 glass water	0

Note: All figures are approximate values. Source material: FoodWorks 8 Professional nutrient analysis software. Available at: [www.xyris.com.au](http://www.xyris.com.au). Accessed December 2016.

Nutrition Information		
Servings per package:	10	
Serving size:	20mL	
	Per 20mL	Per 100mL
Energy	320kJ	1600kJ
Protein	0.6g	3.1g
Fat, total	7.2g	36.0g
– saturated fat	2.0g	10.0g
Carbohydrate, total	2.4g	12.0g
– sugars	2.0g	10.0g
Sodium	220mg	1,100mg

## Use food labels to make healthier choices

Nutrition information panels and ingredients lists can help you choose healthier food and drinks.

The four main nutrients to look for to help you choose healthier food and drinks are:

- energy (kilojoules)
- sodium (salt)
- fibre
- saturated fat and trans fat (not all foods will list how much trans fat they contain).

Compare these nutrients in different brands for similar foods. The ‘quantity per 100 g (or 100 mL)’ column will help you choose foods with lower kilojoules, saturated fat or sodium, or with more fibre. Read the ‘per serving’ value for how much of the nutrient is in each serve.

Foods labelled ‘lite’, ‘light’, ‘low fat’ or ‘low sugar’ may not be lower in kilojoules than other foods. The best way to tell is to read the nutrition information panel and ingredients list.

### ► Checklist: using food labels for healthier choices

- Look at the food as a whole, rather than deciding based on just one nutrient.
- Ingredients are listed in order by weight. If the first few ingredients are fats and/or sugars, then the food is probably high in energy (kilojoules).
- Use the per 100 g (or 100 mL) column to compare products and choose the options that contain less kilojoules, saturated fat, sodium, or the foods with more fibre.
- Keep in mind the amount you eat may be more or less than 100 g or 100 mL. Use the 'per serving' column to check how much of the nutrient you might be eating.
- Avoid foods with 'partially hydrogenated' vegetable oils or vegetable fats listed in the ingredients list - these ingredients have trans fats, and trans fat is not always listed on the nutrition information panel.





## Healthy eating and drinking ideas

Make healthier, lower energy (kilojoule) meals and snacks with these ideas.

### Breakfast ideas

- Make wholegrain or wholemeal toast with a small serve of baked beans, tomatoes, creamed corn, mushrooms or cottage cheese. Or spread thinly with jam, honey or peanut butter. Use spreads made from canola, sunflower or olive oil.
- Have wholegrain cereal such as rolled oats, wheat biscuits or bran cereals. Choose untoasted types and use reduced fat milk or yoghurt. Add some fruit – fresh, stewed or canned. Choose fruit canned in natural or unsweetened juice.
- Poach, boil or scramble eggs made with reduced fat milk. Serve with tomatoes, spinach, mushrooms and salmon. Serve on wholegrain or wholemeal bread.



### Lunch ideas

- Have a sandwich made with wholemeal or wholegrain bread. Fill with lots of salad vegetables and a small serving of lean meat, skinless chicken, canned fish, hommus or a reduced fat cheese.
- Make an interesting salad with plenty of different coloured vegetables. Include lean meats, skinless poultry, fish or legumes (like four bean mix). Try adding fresh fruit or plain, unsalted nuts and seeds. You could add wholemeal pasta, brown rice, couscous or noodles. Use dressings based on olive or canola oil.

- Try a vegetable- or legume-based soup. Serve with crusty wholemeal bread. For a 'creamy soup' use evaporated skim milk instead of cream or full fat milk. Check labels on tinned or instant soups: they may contain a lot of salt.



## Dinner ideas

- Make a stir-fry with lots of vegetables and some lean meat, skinless chicken or fish. Use canola, sunflower, soybean, olive, sesame or peanut oil. Flavour with garlic, onion, chilli or ginger and add some legumes or plain, unsalted nuts. Serve with brown rice.
- Grill or roast a lean cut of meat, skinless poultry or fish, and flavour with herbs, spices or garlic. Serve with vegetables or salad and a grain-based food, such as wholemeal pasta, brown rice, couscous or polenta.
- Make burritos, tacos or tortilla wraps using lean meat, skinless chicken or red kidney beans. Add plenty of vegetables to the mixture and use reduced fat natural yoghurt instead of sour cream.
- Try a vegetable frittata or quiche. Use reduced fat milk and spreads made from canola, sunflower or olive oil in the quiche. Serve with a garden salad.





### Dessert ideas

- Serve fresh fruit salad, or stewed, poached or canned fruit with reduced fat yoghurt. Choose fruit canned in natural or unsweetened juice.
- Make a fruit pie or strudel with filo pastry. Serve with reduced fat yoghurt.

### Snack ideas

- Snack on fruit – fresh, stewed or canned. Choose fruit canned in natural or unsweetened juice.
- Choose reduced fat unflavoured yoghurt.
- Crunch on a small handful of plain, unsalted nuts and seeds.
- Snack on wholegrain or wholemeal crisp bread with sliced tomato and pepper.



### Drink ideas

Plain water is the best drink for you, because it has no energy (kilojoules). It's also cheap and quenches your thirst.

Other suitable choices to include in moderation are:

- plain mineral water
- soda water
- reduced fat milk
- herbal tea
- tea
- coffee.





## Healthy eating doesn't have to be boring



Recovering from a heart event doesn't mean saying goodbye to delicious food.

Explore our free collection of healthy recipes to find your new favourites, and some tricks to improve your old ones. With lots of recipes for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks, you're sure to find something you love.

Visit [heartfoundation.org.au/recipes](https://heartfoundation.org.au/recipes) to browse our collection of delicious and healthier recipes you can make today.

- Being more active every day will help you recover and lower your risk of more problems.
- Talk with your doctor or health professional about how to safely build up your activity.
- Use the action plan on page 120 to set goals for getting more active.

## Be physically active

You should be able to return to your usual activities a few weeks after your heart attack or other heart problem. Talk to your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team about when you can start different activities again and how to pace your program.

### Do regular activity

Regular, moderate-intensity physical activity is good for you, especially if you have coronary heart disease.

It will help you:

- recover better from a heart attack or other heart problems
- reduce your risk of more heart problems
- improve your long-term health
- feel more confident, happy and relaxed
- have more energy
- manage your weight more easily
- improve your cholesterol
- lower your blood pressure
- have stronger bones (and lower your risk of osteoporosis)
- manage your blood glucose levels if you have diabetes.

You won't get these benefits all at once, or all of the same benefits. But doing regular physical activity and reducing the amount of sitting time will improve your health – even if you have coronary heart disease.



## Our recommended activity goals

Aim to build up to doing at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. You can do this in three lots of 10 minutes each if it's easier. For example, you could do 10 minutes each of walking, gardening and light housework.

## Keep walking

Walking is a good type of physical activity for people with coronary heart disease because:

- it is gentle on your body as it is a low-impact activity
- you can go at your own pace
- you can walk and talk with other people which can help with motivation and confidence
- it doesn't cost anything.

## Start slowly

- Do some easy walking around your house and garden or on your street.
- Start by walking on flat ground each day.
- Have a destination in mind, such as the local shop or the end of the block.
- Walk at a pace you find comfortable (a good guide is a pace at which you can still have a conversation).
- Build up gradually – over a few weeks, walk longer distances and then uphill.

Think about joining your local Heart Foundation Walking group. This will help you to keep fit and make new friends. For more information see page 107.

## Guidelines for walking after you leave hospital

Goals	Minimum time (minutes)	Times per day	Pace
1	5–10	2	Stroll
2	10–15	2	Comfortable
3	15–20	2	Comfortable
4	20–25	1–2	Comfortable/ Stride out
5	25–30	1–2	Comfortable/ Stride out
6	30+	1–2	Comfortable/ Stride out

Build up your walking gradually over time. Start at stage 1. Walk up to 10 minutes twice a day. Do this at least two days in a row. If you find this tiring, stay at Stage 1 until you feel stronger. You may need to stay at Stage 1 for a few weeks.

Talk to your doctor or health professional if you aren't sure whether you are doing too much or too little walking.

Only move to the next stage when you meet your walking target without discomfort.

As you advance, it may take longer to move to each new stage. You may take more time to get used to how much more walking you need to do.

If you don't feel well enough to walk one day, let your body get some rest. Miss walking that day, or at least drop back one or two stages.

### Take the stairs?

If there are stairs where you live, you can climb them slowly as soon as you come home from hospital.



As a general rule, if you can walk normally at your usual pace, you can also climb two flights of stairs at your usual pace.

Gradually increase how many stairs you can climb, and how fast you climb them.

### Do sport and other recreational activities

Do the sort of activities you like to do regularly. Start with walking and everyday tasks, like light gardening and housework. Aim to limit the amount of time you sit each day. Gradually add other activities such as cycling and swimming that need more effort.

You may be able to start cycling, swimming, tennis, golf and bowls again after six weeks, as your fitness and confidence increases. Ask your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team about specific sports.

The strain of lifting heavy weights and some other activities can raise your blood pressure, so don't do these in the short term.

You may later include resistance (weight) training with light weights in your activity program. But talk with your doctor or cardiac rehabilitation team before you start this sort of training.

### How much activity is safe?

How you feel is your best guide to doing physical activity at a safe level.

It is normal to worry about what you should and shouldn't do. Slowly build up your activity level based on what your doctor or health professionals tell you. You may feel more comfortable exercising with a friend or family member for increased motivation as well as confidence or safety concerns.

Increase your physical activity slowly. Your doctor will advise you about this when you leave hospital. Also use the walking guidelines on page 72.



Find your local  
walking group.  
Call 13 11 12



### ► Checklist: Stay safe during physical activity

- Start the activity gradually and at a low level of intensity. You should be able to talk without getting short of breath.
- If you want to do more intense physical activity, build up slowly over a number of weeks. As you start to feel better and fitter while being active, increase the intensity so you start to ‘puff’ a little during the activity.
- Talk with your doctor if you want to do more intensive activity or competitive sports.
- Don’t do physical activity if you feel unwell, tired or sore – take a day off to recover.
- Don’t do physical activity straight after meals or alcohol.
- Drink lots of water before, during and after the activity (you will lose water through sweating).
- Share the activity with a friend – you may feel more confident and motivated, and enjoy it more too!
- Carry your mobile telephone with you while walking, so you can call for help if you feel unwell.
- If you need to take angina medicine, keep it with you.



Heart Foundation

# Walking



## Use your feet to protect your heart

Join Heart Foundation Walking to get more active and walk your way to a healthier heart. Heart Foundation Walking is free for everyone! Join your local group and track your walking every day by signing up online as a virtual walker.

To join Heart Foundation Walking call **13 11 12**  
or visit **[walking.heartfoundation.org.au](http://walking.heartfoundation.org.au)**

Proudly supported by



Program sponsor

- Being a healthy weight is important to avoid more heart problems.
- Talk to your doctor about whether you need to lose weight.
- If you do need to lose weight, plan to do it the healthy way.
- Change your eating habits, do more physical activity and sit less.
- Use the action plan on page 122 to set goals for keeping to a healthy weight.

## Be a healthy weight

It's important to be a healthy body weight because it lowers your risk of more heart problems. It reduces your risk of developing diabetes (see pages 83–84), and helps lower your blood pressure and cholesterol.

If you carry extra weight around your middle (being 'apple-shaped') it's a bigger health risk than if you are just overweight. It's very important for you to lose weight if this is the case.

### Our recommended goals

The Heart Foundation recommends you aim for a waist measurement of less than:

- 94 cm for males
- 80 cm for females.

Body mass index, or (BMI), is used to determine whether you are in a healthy weight range for your height. We recommend, for a healthy weight, for your BMI to be between 18.5 and 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

BMI is a useful measurement for most people over 18 years old. But it is only an estimate and it doesn't take into account gender, age, ethnicity and body composition. We recommend you also check your waist measurement, and other risk factors.

To calculate your BMI, measure your body weight (in kilograms) and divide it by the square of your height (in metres). For example, if you weighed 75 kg and were 1.7 m tall, your BMI would be:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{BMI} &= \frac{75 \text{ kg}}{(1.7 \text{ m} \times 1.7 \text{ m})} \\ &= 75 \text{ kg} \div 2.89 \text{ m} \\ &= 25.95 \text{ kg/m}^2 \end{aligned}$$

Visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au/BMI](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/BMI) to calculate your BMI online.



## Lose weight healthily

To lose weight, you need to use up more energy (kilojoules) than you take in. You can do this by:

- reducing your kilojoule intake by having lower kilojoule foods and drinks
- increasing your kilojoule use by doing more physical activity and sitting less.

Losing weight the healthy way is not quick.

Many weight loss books and crash diets often suggest unhealthy ways to lose weight and won't help you keep weight off in the long term.

It comes down to the type and amount of food and drinks and the type and amount of physical activity you do. Don't think about it as 'going on a diet' which is a short-term thing, but as a choice to be healthy for life!

People tend to put weight on over time, sometimes several years. Losing it will not happen overnight. You should not lose it too quickly or ignore what a health professional tells you. If you are making lifestyle changes, then generally the weight loss will follow.

As an easy first step to losing weight, you can:

- change the types and amount of foods and drinks you consume
- increase your physical activity levels – every little bit helps
- reduce the amount of time you spend sitting, stand up more often and move around your home, workplace or when you are out and about.

Doing only one of these is usually not enough.



### ▶ Checklist: lose weight the healthy way

Lower your energy (kilojoules) intake by:

- making fresh foods the main part of your diet. Include a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, lean meat, poultry and fish, reduced fat dairy, plain unsalted nuts and legumes.
- watching your portion sizes.

Use more energy by doing more physical activity and sitting less often. Ask your doctor if you need to do more than 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week to lose weight.

### Do a weight loss plan

If you and your doctor agree that you need to lose weight, plan how to do it together. This will help you decide on the lifestyle changes you will make. It will also help you to be realistic about what you can achieve.

Make a list of things to help you lose weight. Include ways of having better eating habits, doing more physical activity and sitting less often like:

- follow a healthy diet
- go for a 30-minute walk on most days of the week
- watch less TV or spend less time in front of a computer each day.

### ► Weight loss plan steps

**Step 1** Set realistic weight loss or lifestyle goals.

**Step 2** Identify what you eat and drink, your level of physical activity and amount of sitting time.

**Step 3** Make changes to what you eat and drink.

**Step 4** Do more physical activity and sit less often. Be as active as you can in as many ways as possible. Do this on most, if not all, days of the week.

**Step 5** Keep going with your weight loss plan.



### Make weight loss last

Once you have a healthy body weight, keep it there by balancing the kilojoules you get from your food and drinks with how much you use by doing physical activity.

See pages 53–74 for more information on keeping a healthy body weight by healthy eating and doing physical activity.

Get walking tips at  
[walking.heartfoundation.org.au](http://walking.heartfoundation.org.au)

- **If you smoke, you must quit. It's never too late to make a difference to your health.**
- **Get help from your doctor or health professional, or call the Quitline (13 78 48).**
- **Avoid second-hand smoke.**
- **Use the action plan on page 124 to set goals for quitting or avoiding smoke.**

## Quit smoking

Quitting smoking is an important way to lower your risk of more heart problems.

It's never too late to quit. Even if you already have smoking-related health problems, like heart disease, quitting helps. From the moment you quit, your risk of heart attack begins to drop. And you will feel the benefits almost immediately.

### Know the risks of smoking

Smoking reduces the amount of oxygen in your blood, and damages and weakens artery walls.

Smoking can increase:

- your risk of stroke by three times
- your risk of peripheral arterial disease (e.g. clogging of the arteries in your legs) by more than five times
- the chance of an artery wall becoming weak and possibly rupturing by six to seven times.

Cigarette smoke has thousands of chemicals, including these dangerous ones:

- nicotine – an addictive drug that affects your brain and muscle activity, and increases your blood pressure, making your heart work harder
- carbon monoxide – a poisonous gas that replaces oxygen in your blood, making your heart beat faster than usual
- tar – a sticky substance that coats your lungs like soot in a chimney, making it hard for you to breathe, and that contains a variety of chemicals that cause cancer.

## What about second-hand smoke?

Try not to be around other people who smoke. Being exposed to second-hand smoke (passive smoking) on a regular basis increases your risk of coronary heart disease by about 30%.

## What about e-cigarettes?

The Heart Foundation does not support using e-cigarettes. It's better to stop smoking altogether.

## You can learn to quit

Quitting smoking can be hard at first. But the benefits of quitting outweigh any temporary difficulties or symptoms you may feel.

## Plan to quit

- Set a date for quitting. While in hospital is a good time to start.
- Begin to change your habits.
- Learn how to handle stress and urges to smoke.
- Think about who and what can help you through the tough times.

## Don't give up

Many people slip up after they quit and start smoking again. Don't see this as a failure. Instead think about what made you smoke again. How can you deal with this situation next time? What worked and what didn't work? Learn from this and try quitting again. You become better at quitting each time you try.





## Things to help you quit

- Talk with your doctor and other health professionals about quitting smoking. They can tell you what options are available to help you to quit, and can check your progress.
- Talk to your doctor about using nicotine replacement products (e.g. nicotine gums, patches or lozenges), or bupropion or varenicline tablets. These products can double your chances of quitting successfully.
- Ask your family and friends for support and encouragement.
- Read about how to quit and do quit smoking courses.
- Call the Quitline on 13 78 48 for information and advice about quitting smoking.
- Make sure your home and car are smoke free.

## Manage diabetes

Diabetes is a condition that affects the way body cells take up and use glucose from the blood. If you have high blood glucose levels you may have diabetes. This increases your risk of cardiovascular disease; for example, heart attack, angina or stroke.

There are two main types of diabetes - type 1 and type 2.

People with cardiovascular disease often have type 2 diabetes. This makes up 90% of diabetes cases.

Diabetes is on the rise. The best way to manage diabetes is to be physically active, eat a healthy diet and achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Talk to your doctor about screening for diabetes.

### Our recommended diabetes goals

Manage your diabetes long term. Ask your doctor to check your blood glucose levels with a regular HbA1c (glycosylated haemoglobin) blood test. This shows your average blood glucose levels over the past 10 to 12 weeks.

Generally, aim for an HbA1c level of less than or equal to 7%. These goals can vary for different people. Find out from your doctor or accredited diabetes educator what your blood glucose and HbA1c goals should be.

Keep a record of your blood glucose levels. This will help you and your doctor to best manage your diabetes together.

- **Having diabetes puts you at a higher risk of heart attack or stroke.**
- **Ask your doctor about screening for diabetes.**
- **If you have diabetes, work with your doctor to manage it. Use the action plan on page 126 to set goals.**



## How to manage diabetes

Work with your doctor to make a plan for managing diabetes.

Your doctor will advise lifestyle changes like being physically active, eating healthy foods and staying at a healthy weight.

You should also:

- stop smoking (see pages 80–82)
- manage your blood pressure (see pages 85–88)
- manage your cholesterol (see pages 89–90)
- regularly see your doctor for diabetes reviews.

If you have type 2 diabetes, you may need to take medicines to help you to maintain normal blood glucose levels.

Your doctor may also refer you to an accredited diabetes educator or clinic.

For more information, visit the Diabetes Australia website at [www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au).



# Manage high blood pressure

## What is blood pressure?

Blood pressure is the pressure of your blood on the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps it around your body.

As your heart pumps, your blood pressure rises and falls in a regular 'wave' pattern. It peaks when your heart pumps and falls when your heart relaxes. The pressure in your arteries when your heart beats is called 'systolic pressure'. The pressure between beats is called 'diastolic pressure'.

A blood pressure reading is usually shown as the systolic pressure over the diastolic pressure, as in 130/80.

Having normal blood pressure matters. Over time, high blood pressure can overload your heart and blood vessels and speed up the artery-clogging process. This can cause a heart attack, heart failure or stroke. It can also affect other vital organs, like your kidneys and brain.

Your blood pressure can vary. It can be affected by things like your breathing, body position, emotional state, physical activity, sleep, medicines and stimulants (like alcohol or coffee).

Blood pressure is usually lowest when you are sleeping and highest when you are excited, upset or physically active.

Temporary rises are normal and your blood pressure should return to its usual level when you are resting. Because these changes can make it hard for your doctor to get a 'true' reading of your blood pressure, he or she may need to measure your blood pressure several times over several visits.

- Having high blood pressure over a long time can cause heart problems.
- Have regular blood pressure checks.
- Work with your doctor to manage your high blood pressure. Use the action plan on page 128 to set goals.





## Our recommended blood pressure goals

Aim to have a target blood pressure of less than 130/80. Talk with your doctor about what your blood pressure should be.

## Why does blood pressure stay too high?

The exact cause of high blood pressure is often not clear.

Your family history, eating habits, alcohol intake, weight and level of physical activity affect your blood pressure.

In some people, medicines, including the oral contraceptive pill, contraceptive 'depot' injections, steroids (cortisone-like medicines) and arthritis medicines, can also raise blood pressure.

The medical term for constantly high blood pressure is 'hypertension'.

## Have regular blood pressure checks

Often you won't have any symptoms to warn you that you have high blood pressure, so have your doctor check it regularly to stop it causing any serious health problems.

If you have coronary heart disease, blood pressure-lowering medicine is a common way to reach a good blood pressure level.

Your doctor also needs to check if all your medicines are working properly and change them if necessary.

## Did you know?

High blood pressure can be a sign that your kidneys are not working properly. Ask your doctor for a kidney health check.

## Why check your blood pressure at home?

Your blood pressure may be different at home to what it is in the hospital or at the doctor's. Home measurements can give more information and help your doctor decide about treatment.

Your doctor may show you how to measure your blood pressure yourself and ask you to bring the results to your next appointments. They may ask you to wear a special monitor that records your blood pressure over 24 hours.

## How to manage my high blood pressure

Even if you take a blood pressure-lowering medicine, you still need to change your lifestyle for better blood pressure and health.

### Ways to lower your blood pressure include:

- losing weight, if you're overweight
- being more physically active
- limiting your alcohol intake
- quitting smoking
- eating healthy foods, and reducing your salt (sodium) intake (see page 57).



### To help to decrease your salt intake:

- make fresh foods the main part of your diet – include a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, lean meat, poultry and fish, reduced fat dairy, plain unsalted nuts and legumes
- avoid high salt foods, such as potato crisps/chips, salted nuts, commercial sauces (e.g. tomato, soy and fish), processed meat and most take-away foods
- use food labels to choose low or reduced salt options of your favourite foods
- flavour meals with herbs and spices rather than salt
- aim for foods with less than 400 mg of sodium per 100 g. Foods with less than 120 mg of sodium per 100 g are considered low in salt.

Still got  
questions? Ask  
about your diet  
on 13 11 12

# Manage cholesterol

## What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that is carried around the body in the blood. The body produces most cholesterol naturally, and it is found in some foods. Lipoproteins carry cholesterol in the blood. The two main types that carry cholesterol to and from cells are called low density lipoproteins (LDL-C) and high density lipoproteins (HDL-C).

The lower the density of the lipoproteins the more fats it contains. High density lipoprotein (HDL cholesterol) is called the 'good cholesterol' because it helps to keep cholesterol from building up in the arteries. Low density lipoprotein (LDL cholesterol) is called the 'bad cholesterol' because it is the main source of cholesterol build-up and blockage in the arteries. Statin medication work to reduce this LDL-C.

Total cholesterol is a reading of the good and bad cholesterol. Triglycerides are another form of fat in the blood that can also raise the risk of heart disease. High triglycerides are often associated with low HDL cholesterol increasing risk, even though total cholesterol levels in the blood appear normal. When there is too much LDL-cholesterol in the blood, it builds up in the walls of the arteries (plaque). Over time, this build up causes 'hardening of the arteries'. This can cause chest pain and/ or a heart attack.

## What causes too much cholesterol?

Eating a lot of foods high in saturated and trans fat raises your cholesterol. Reducing saturated and trans fats, and replacing them with healthy fats can help lower your cholesterol.

The main sources of saturated fat include:

- deep fried take-away foods and bought pies, biscuits, buns and pastries

- **Too much cholesterol in the blood over time can cause a heart attack or stroke.**
- **Work with your doctor to manage high cholesterol. Use the action plan on page 130 to set goals.**



- fatty meats
- full fat dairy products and butter, coconut and palm oils.

Foods high in trans fat include bought pies, biscuits, buns and pastries, and deep-fried take-away foods.

Eating healthy foods can help to manage your cholesterol. See pages 55–56 for more information about replacing saturated and trans fats with healthier fats, and page 54 for our healthy eating checklist.

### Our recommended cholesterol goals

It is generally better if you have lower LDL cholesterol and triglycerides, and higher HDL cholesterol. This is especially true if you have coronary heart disease or are at risk of getting cardiovascular disease.

If you have coronary heart disease, we generally recommend:

- LDL cholesterol less than 1.8 mmol/L
- HDL cholesterol greater than 1.0 mmol/L
- fasting triglycerides less than 2.0 mmol/L.

Talk with your doctor about what your cholesterol and triglycerides should be.

### Keep your cholesterol low

1. Take cholesterol-lowering medicines as your doctor directs. Statins are recommended for almost everyone with heart disease, even if your cholesterol is not elevated. See page 33 for more information about statins.
2. Healthy eating, especially eating less saturated and trans fats and replacing them with healthier fats. See pages 53–68 for more information about healthy eating.
3. Be physically active. See pages 70–74 for more information.

# Alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol increases your risk of high blood pressure. It also increases your risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, and many other problems.

We recommend that healthy men and women drink no more than two standard alcoholic drinks a day. If you have high blood pressure, chronic heart failure, cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, liver disease or diabetes, or are obese, you may need to drink less than the above recommended limits. Alcohol causes high triglycerides and low HDL cholesterol. Talk with your doctor to find out what is right for you.

If you don't already drink alcohol, or drink less than these limits, don't drink more.

## Tips to lower your alcohol intake

- Alternate your alcoholic drinks with low kilojoule drinks, such as tap water or plain mineral water.
- Dilute your alcoholic drinks with plain mineral water or soda water when you can.
- Use only half-measures of spirits.
- Choose a low alcohol or light beer.
- Choose a low alcohol wine.
- When you are thirsty, drink cold water instead of alcohol. Keep a jug of water on the table with your meals.

## What's a standard drink?

Examples of a standard drink are a can of mid-strength beer, a small glass of wine or a nip of spirits.



**1**  
375ml  
Mid Strength  
3.5% Alc. Vol



**1**  
100ml  
Standard Serve  
of Red Wine  
13.5% Alc. Vol

Examples of a standard drink. Note: options in the table vary depending on the amount (mL) and alcoholic strength.

## Tables of standard drink measures

Use the following charts to check how many standard drinks you have a day or in a week. The number beneath each container gives the number of standard drinks.

RTD = ready-to-drink

Reproduced with permission: National Health and Medical Research Council

### NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS – BEER



**1.1**  
285ml  
Full Strength  
4.8% Alc. Vol



**0.8**  
285ml  
Mid Strength  
3.5% Alc. Vol



**0.6**  
285ml  
Low Strength  
2.7% Alc. Vol



**1.6**  
495ml  
Full Strength  
4.8% Alc. Vol



**1.2**  
495ml  
Mid Strength  
3.5% Alc. Vol



**0.9**  
495ml  
Low Strength  
2.7% Alc. Vol



**1.4**  
375ml  
Full Strength  
4.8% Alc. Vol



**1**  
375ml  
Mid Strength  
3.5% Alc. Vol



**0.8**  
375ml  
Low Strength  
2.7% Alc. Vol



**1.4**  
375ml  
Full Strength  
4.8% Alc. Vol



**1**  
375ml  
Mid Strength  
3.5% Alc. Vol



**0.8**  
375ml  
Low Strength  
2.7% Alc. Vol



**34**  
24 x 375ml  
Full Strength  
4.8% Alc. Vol



**24**  
24 x 375ml  
Mid Strength  
3.5% Alc. Vol



**19**  
24 x 375ml  
Low Strength  
2.7% Alc. Vol

## NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS – WINE



## NUMBER OF STANDARD DRINKS – SPIRITS



\* Ready-to-Drink

- Depression and a lack of social support can slow your recovery. They can also increase your risk of more problems.
- Monitor how you're feeling and talk to your doctor if you think you might have depression.
- Use the action plan on page 134 to set goals for looking after your emotional health.

## Manage your emotional and social life

After a heart attack or other heart problem, it is normal to feel sad, angry, anxious, guilty, lonely, confused or stressed.

You may have one or more of these feelings. They may last a few hours, days or a couple of weeks. We recommend that you talk with your doctor if they last longer than two weeks.

Some emotional and social factors, like depression, being socially isolated or not having social support, can affect your recovery and future health. It's important for you to take care of your emotional and mental health, as well as your physical health.

### What is depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad or having a low mood – it's a serious illness.

If you have depression you can find it hard to do everyday things. You may not want to be with friends or family, or enjoy working or playing sport. Depression also affects your relationships and overall sense of wellbeing.

You might get depression for different reasons. This may be to do with your heart problem, family or work problems, or feeling overwhelmed by having to change your lifestyle. It can also be caused by a chemical imbalance in your brain. Some medicines may cause depression as a side effect.

Know the signs of depression. Ask for help when you need it. Your doctor can tell you different ways of treating it.

## Depression and coronary heart disease

Depression and coronary heart disease often go together.

Evidence shows depression can be a risk factor for coronary heart disease.

Depression can also slow your recovery – and increase your risk of more heart problems.

Managing depression will help you recover better. It can reduce your risk of more heart problems and help you stay healthy.

## Depression can be treated

### ▶ Checklist: How to tell if you're depressed

You may be depressed if for more than two weeks you have felt sad, down or miserable most of the time, or you've lost pleasure in usual activities, and you've also experienced some of these signs and symptoms:

- not going out
- not speaking with or seeing close family members and friends
- using alcohol, sedatives or other drugs
- not doing things you once enjoyed
- not being able to concentrate
- feeling overwhelmed, guilty or irritable
- feeling disappointed, miserable or sad
- feeling frustrated, unhappy or indecisive
- having headaches and muscle pain
- not sleeping properly or sleeping too much
- loss or change of appetite.





Depression is just like any other illness; there are treatments for it.

Medical treatments include anti-depressant medicines to relieve the physical symptoms.

If you have mild depression and heart disease, cardiac rehabilitation programs and regular physical activity can help. You may also benefit from psychological therapies and, if necessary, medication.

### ► Checklist: Managing depression

If you think you have depression or you have been diagnosed with it, there are different ways to manage it. These things may also help to lower your risk of coronary heart disease.

- Talk with your doctor and health professionals about your concerns and what treatments you can get.
- Ask for and accept help, support and encouragement from family and friends.
- Spend time with people to feel less isolated by joining support groups, doing social activities, or visiting or calling family and friends.
- Be active; this will improve both your physical and mental health.
- Eat different types of healthy foods.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Get enough sleep.
- Take time to relax and reduce your stress levels.
- Have regular check-ups and take your medicines as directed.

## Social isolation and lack of social support

### What is social isolation and lack of social support?

Social isolation can occur when you live alone or if you feel lonely (isolated) for other reasons.

Social support is when you have friends and family who listen to you and understand how you feel. They give you emotional support and you share activities with them like dinners, drinks, sports, picnics and other outings.

### Social isolation, social support and coronary heart disease

People who live alone or are lonely may have a higher risk of coronary heart disease than people who have support from family and friends.

### Why being connected and having social support is important

You will get well faster and more easily when other people, like your family, friends, health professionals, and support groups, help you.

Your cardiac rehabilitation program is an important way to give you support and comfort. You get the advice and care of health professionals while sharing experiences with others who have similar heart problems. See page 35 for more information about cardiac rehabilitation.

Joining groups such as walking groups and clubs where you can get support and meet new people can also be an important part of your recovery.

Websites such as [www.heartfoundation.org.au/aftermyheartattack](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/aftermyheartattack) can also offer support.

## Strategies that may help your relationships

Coming to terms with a long-term health condition, such as a heart attack or heart surgery, and all that goes with that can put a strain on you, your family and your friends. It can be difficult to talk with people about your condition, even if they are close to you. Be open about how you feel and let your family and friends know what they can do to help.

The way you feel about yourself will probably change and coping with any physical and emotional changes can affect how you feel and interact with others. It is very likely that some of the roles you played in a relationship will change. Recognising this and accepting this can be a way to move forward.

If you have a partner, think about things from their perspective as well. Your heart attack or heart surgery has affected them too so try to be understanding about what they are going through. Don't rush or expect things to be the same straight away. Adjustments take time for everyone.

### *beyondblue*

*beyondblue* is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to increase awareness and understanding of depression and anxiety in Australia and to reduce the associated stigma.

Some of the information in this section was reproduced with permission from *beyondblue*. For more information on depression and anxiety, available treatments and where to get help, visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or call 1300 22 46 36.

## ► A letter from one person with coronary heart disease to another

*You will often hear the phrase 'coping with coronary heart disease', but 'coping' seems to mean 'getting by'. You and your carer will need to do more than 'get by' to deal with the situation that has entered your lives, in so many instances without warning.*

Thinking 'heart condition' will help you to 'own' the condition – for now it is very much a part of your life.

From now on, start thinking 'managing'. By doing so, you are saying you are in control; you are 'managing your heart condition'.

However, before you learn to manage, you need to know what it is you are managing. It is now that you and your carer learn how similar the path that you both need to travel is.

You may have one or more of a range of emotions.

Anger, sadness or anxiety are the most common emotions. You may feel them from the moment you are first diagnosed as having a heart condition, through to post-operative recovery.

*Anger* may come from a sense of intrusion, of the inconvenience to not only your lifestyle, but also to plans for your future. You may also feel angry at yourself for 'getting into this situation'. Anger fades with time, but if it lasts, you may want to talk to your doctor.

*Sadness or feeling 'down'* is probably the most common emotion. Perhaps your main question is, 'Why me?'. If you can't answer this question, you might ignore or even deny the issue. Again, if this emotion doesn't ease with time, talk with your doctor.

*Anxiety* nearly always relates to the future: What about my work? What about my family? Anxiety affects everyone at some time, but it is very strong when you are concerned about your health.

A heart condition casts a darker shadow than most, for underlying all of the above is fear.

As well as questions about family, friends and work, other questions may tumble through your mind. How much pain can I stand? How far can I push myself physically? What is the danger of doing too much or too little? How much can I expect of others and of myself? Can I cope and how much of my burden do I share?

And always sitting in a deep recess of your mind are the questions – Will it happen again? What if it happens again?

The level of your emotion depends on you and your circumstances, but take some comfort in knowing that these emotions usually fade with time.

Any patient or carer who reads this may have experienced all or some of these emotions. Rest assured they are quite common. You are not alone. These are the many emotions you may come across before you set about managing your heart condition.

Printed with kind permission – Gerry Atkinson, board member, Heart Foundation (WA).

