

Show your heart some love

A guide to understanding heart disease risk factors –
and learning ways to support a healthier heart

United Healthcare®

Let’s start at the heart of it

As the hardest-working muscle in your body, your heart is essential for just about everything that keeps it healthy – from pumping blood to delivering oxygen and nutrients to your cells.

Getting smart about heart health may have long-term benefits for your overall well-being. With help from this guide, you’ll learn about common risks for heart disease, how to reduce those risks and steps to move you toward a healthier lifestyle.

In this guide:

Learn about heart disease risk factors 3

Get tips to start a conversation with your doctor 4

Explore programs and tips for a healthier lifestyle 5–7



A closer look at heart disease

Heart disease – also known as cardiovascular disease – is the top cause of death in the U.S.[1] It prevents the heart from pumping blood the way it should. That means blood may have trouble getting to the heart, lungs and other organs.

Common risk factors

Anyone can develop heart disease, but you may be more at risk if you have certain health conditions. Take heart, though: Some risk factors can be controlled, and it may be possible to prevent, stabilize or even improve some of the causes of heart disease.



Diabetes
Diabetes and heart disease often go hand in hand – because, over time, high blood sugar levels can harm blood vessels and the nerves that control the heart. People with diabetes are 2 times more likely to have heart disease or stroke.[2] Keeping blood sugar in a healthy range may help fend off some of that extra risk.



High blood pressure
High blood pressure can do damage throughout the body and may raise the risk of heart failure, kidney disease, blindness and more. One slightly above-normal reading may not be a problem. But when readings on 2 or more occasions are elevated, it may be a concern – and a signal for action.



High cholesterol
It's normal to have some cholesterol. But if levels aren't on target, the stage can be set for clogged arteries – and a heart attack or stroke. Having your cholesterol checked is a good way to know where you stand.



Overweight or obesity
Carrying around extra pounds may take a toll on the heart – and may raise the risk of heart disease. Losing even a modest amount of weight – 5-10% of your weight – may help improve health.[3]



Physical inactivity
People who are inactive are nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease as those who are active.[4] Aerobic exercise benefits the heart and lungs the most, but even modest amounts of physical activity are good for health. Generally speaking, most adults should aim for at least 2.5 hours a week of moderate aerobic physical activity* – such as taking a walk, raking the yard or swimming.



Smoking
Quitting smoking is one of the most important things people can do to reduce their risk for heart disease.[5] People who smoke are 2 to 4 times more likely to develop heart disease than nonsmokers.[5] The good news is that as soon as someone quits smoking, their risk begins to go down – and continues to decrease over time.[5]

*For safety's sake, talk with your doctor before significantly increasing your activity level.

Have a heart-to-heart with your doctor

Taking care of your heart is important to your overall health. A good way to learn about heart disease risk factors is by getting in touch with your primary doctor, which may also be called a primary care provider (PCP). No matter the name, you can think of them as your heart health guide. They know your health history and health goals – and can help you learn ways to protect your heart's health.

Questions to start the convo

Here are some important heart-health questions you might ask your doctor at your next checkup:

"What should my blood pressure be? How often should it be checked?"

"What should my cholesterol and triglyceride levels be? How often should they be checked?"

"What's a healthy weight for me?"

"Can you suggest any resources that could help me lose weight or stop smoking?"

"Should I be screened for diabetes? What should my blood sugar level be?"

"What lifestyle changes would you recommend for me?"

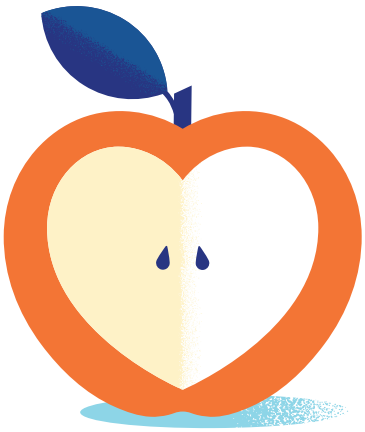
"How can I make sure I'm taking my prescription medications the right way? And what should I do if I'm having side effects?"

To find a network doctor:

- Scan this code with your phone
- Sign in at **myuhc.com**® and select **Find Care > Primary care providers**
- Contact the Concierge Care Team by calling the phone number on the back of your member ID card. A dedicated concierge advocate can assist you with finding a doctor or making an appointment.

Get in on heart-healthy programs

Your health plan includes access to wellness programs and resources that are designed to help support healthier habits, a healthier heart and better overall health. Plus, they're all available to you at no additional cost. You can also search for local services and programs that may offer free or reduced-cost medical care, food, housing, transportation and more on **Your Connection to Community Resources**.



Build healthier habits with Real Appeal

Connect with a community of support with **Real Appeal®**, an online weight-loss program designed to inspire healthier behaviors. It includes:

- Online, coach-led group sessions that focus on a variety of wellness topics
- A Success Kit with kitchen tools and guides delivered to your door
- Motivational resources and a personalized online dashboard to track your progress

As part of the Real Appeal community, you'll have the support of other members to help cheer you on – right from the start.

Tap into mental health support

Get connected to self-help digital tools, in-person or virtual **mental health** providers and other resources that may help with a variety of concerns, such as:

- Compulsive habits and eating disorders
- Medication management and substance use issues
- Relationship difficulties, grief and loss
- Stress, depression and anxiety

Sometimes you may need someone to talk to – so it's nice to know that support is available.

Members also have access to Calm Health through the Calm Health app. Visit **uhc.app/calm** to get started. (You'll be prompted to sign in on the UnitedHealthcare® app or at **myuhc.com** first. If you don't have an account, select Register to create one.)

Connect with a Concierge Care Team member

When you call a concierge advocate, you'll be connected with someone who's specially trained to help answer your questions. Concierge advocates have access to a team of professionals skilled in clinical care, emotional health and more – and they're here to help you:

- Access the care that fits your needs
- Make more informed health care decisions
- Understand your benefits

To talk with a Concierge Care Team member, call the phone number on your member ID card or use the click-to-chat function at **myuhc.com.**

Tips for living healthier every day

It's never too late, or too early, to take steps to protect your heart by making heart-healthy choices. Here are a few tips to get started.





Tip 1: Eat smart

Making small yet simple changes to your diet may make a big difference. Stocking your pantry and fridge with the good things your heart deserves may help you eat healthier – and help lower your risk of heart disease. Focus on these 5 love-your-heart food types:

1. **Fruits and veggies**
   For a wide range of nutrients, go for a colorful medley of fresh produce.
2. **Whole grains**
   Select whole-grain breads, pastas, tortillas and cereals. Other options to embrace include brown rice, wild rice, bulgur, quinoa and oatmeal.
3. **Lean proteins**
   Consider skinless poultry, seafood and lean cuts of other meats, such as round or loin. Some varieties of fish – such as salmon and trout – offer heart-friendly omega-3 fatty acids too.* And how about being ready with a few meatless protein choices? You might choose beans, tofu or unsalted nuts and seeds.
4. **Low-fat dairy products**
   Go fat-free or low-fat when it comes to milk, cheese, yogurt and other dairy choices.
5. **Healthy oils**
   Reach for unsaturated, heart-healthy vegetable oils, such as olive, canola, corn, safflower or sunflower.

Tip 2: Get active

Remember that something may be better than nothing, so try your best to incorporate physical activity into your routine every day. Here are 3 ways to get pumped about getting active:

1. **Focus on fun**
   You're more likely to stick with activities you enjoy. So whether it's basketball, biking or walking laps around a mall, try to find fitness pursuits that make you happy.
2. **Bring along a buddy**
   Ask a friend to join your heart-healthy mission – and cheer each other on. Meet for walks and talks. Or team up for a fun run.
3. **Seize the moment**
   Throughout your day, find times to squeeze in short bursts of activity. Aim for at least 10 minutes at a time. Maybe that's a quick stroll around the block or a quick set of lunges between loads of laundry or conference calls.

*Certain people are encouraged to eat fish that is low in mercury. This includes women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children. Learn more about mercury in fish.

Tip 3: Reduce stress

Some stress is unavoidable, but there are healthy ways to help manage it. Here are 3 techniques to try:

1. **Be proactive**
   Declutter your day by crossing off any to-dos that aren't musts — or bump them to another day. If there's a stressful day coming up, plan ahead by packing a nutritious lunch and getting a good night's sleep.

2. **Soothe stress when it strikes**
   Take a breather: Close your eyes and take slow, deep breaths to help yourself relax. Or try taking a quick stroll. It may ease tension in the moment.

3. **Regroup and unwind**
   Kick back for a few minutes after a stressful day. Turn on a calming playlist — or just take a quiet moment to collect your thoughts. Another option? Talk with a supportive loved one or friend. It might help you feel better — and it might help you see challenges in new ways.



Keep in mind

Everyone may have "off" days, so it's good to remember that a healthier lifestyle is your goal for the long term.

Questions about heart health?

Your primary doctor can help guide you to answers. To find a network doctor, scan this code with your phone or sign in at **myuhc.com** and select **Find Care > Primary care providers.**

Want to learn more?

Scan the code or visit **uhc.com/health-and-wellness/health-topics/heart-health** for heart-healthy tips, eating plans and more.

United Healthcare®

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Deaths and mortality. cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm. Last reviewed June 26, 2025. Accessed Aug. 29, 2025.

[2] American Diabetes Association. Diabetes can affect your heart. diabetes.org/health-wellness/diabetes-and-your-heart/diabetes-affect-your-heart. Accessed Aug. 29, 2025.

[3] American Heart Association. Lose Weight and Lower Heart Disease Risk. heart.org/en/healthy-living/go-red-get-fit/lose-weight-lower-heart-disease-risk. Last reviewed Jan. 31, 2024. Accessed Aug. 29, 2025.

[4] National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Increase physical activity. https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/publications/HM-2022-MoveMoreFactSheet_508.pdf. Accessed Aug. 29, 2025.

[5] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health effects of cigarettes: Cardiovascular disease. cdc.gov/tobacco/about/cigarettes-and-cardiovascular-disease.html. Last updated Sept. 17, 2024. Accessed Aug. 29, 2025.

Real Appeal is a voluntary weight management program that is offered to eligible members at no additional cost as part of their benefit plan. The information provided under this program is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be nor should be construed as medical and/or nutritional advice. Participants should consult an appropriate health care professional to determine what may be right for them. Results, if any, may vary. Any items/tools that are provided may be taxable and participants should consult an appropriate tax professional to determine any tax obligations they may have from receiving items/tools under the program.

UnitedHealthcare concierge advocates should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. The information provided through the UnitedHealthcare Concierge Team is for informational purposes only and provided as part of your health plan. Wellness nurses, coaches and other representatives cannot diagnose problems or recommend treatment and are not a substitute for your doctor's care. Your health information is kept confidential in accordance with the law. Advocate services are not an insurance program and may be discontinued at any time.

Administrative services provided by United HealthCare Services, Inc. or their affiliates.

B2C EI265766553.1 10/26 © 2026 United HealthCare Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved. ES26-6828550a