

Healthy Steps to a Healthy Heart

From your friends at Blue Care Network

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How cholesterol, blood pressure, physical activity and weight affect your heart

The heart is a hard-working pump. Every day it beats 100,000 times sending oxygen-rich blood to all parts of your body. Interfere with the pumping action, and some parts of your body won't get the nutrients they need when they need them.

Cholesterol, blood pressure, diet and exercise affect the heart's pumping. Too much of one or not enough of another, and your heart starts to suffer.

- Everyone has cholesterol, a soft, fat-like substance in your blood and in your body's cells. Your body produces all the cholesterol you need, so you don't need to eat foods that contain it. But a lot of foods do contain cholesterol, which means you may be getting too much. Too much cholesterol increases the risk of hardening of the arteries, leading to heart and blood vessel disease.
- You can't feel high blood pressure, but your heart can. Too much pressure increases the heart's workload, causing the heart to thicken and become stiffer.
- Excess weight increases the heart's work. Because there's more of you, the heart has to pump harder to get the blood where it has to go. Obesity also raises blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels and puts you at risk for developing many diseases.
- The heart is a muscle that needs exercise to be in top form. Physical activity strengthens healthy muscle — even in a heart that has been damaged by a heart attack. Inactivity has the opposite effect, weakening the muscle.

Cholesterol, blood pressure, diet and exercise don't just connect to the heart. They connect to each other. Eating right may help you control your cholesterol and blood pressure levels. Exercise can increase the good cholesterol in your blood and lower the bad. It can also help control blood pressure and weight.

Did you know?

- Thousands more men die from heart disease every year than women, and they die at an earlier age.
- Men develop risks for heart disease at a younger age than women do. In men, the risk of having a heart attack increases after age 45; in women, the risk increases after 55.

A healthy diet = a healthy you

One of the best ways to lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels and keep your heart healthy is to eat a healthy diet. This doesn't mean limiting your eating to carrot and celery sticks. The DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), recommended by the American Heart Association, offers these guidelines:

- Keep your calorie count to no more than 2,000 calories a day.
- Eat foods that are low in saturated and total fat.
- Focus meals on whole grains, low-fat dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables, poultry, fish and nuts.
- Include foods that are high in potassium, calcium and fiber.

Other healthy diet tips include:

- Limiting sodium intake to 2,400 mg or less per day (2,400 mg = 1 teaspoon salt). This means checking food labels carefully for sodium content.
- Limiting alcohol consumption: for men, two drinks per day or less; for women, one drink per day or less.

Recipe

Heart-Healthy Pancakes with Strawberries

Ingredients

- 1½ cups fresh or frozen strawberries
- 2 tablespoons reduced-sugar preserves, any flavor
- 1 cup buckwheat pancake mix and water as directed on the package
- ¼ cup light sour cream or low-fat vanilla yogurt

Instructions

- In a saucepan, mix berries and preserves and cook about 5 minutes. Set aside and keep warm.
- In a bowl, combine pancake mix with water as directed and make a slightly thin batter. Pour ⅓ cup onto griddle or into large nonstick pan (sprayed with cooking spray).
- Cook until edges are dry, then flip and cook until done. Repeat with the rest of the batter.
- Place ¼ cup of the berry mixture into the center of each pancake and roll. Transfer to a plate and serve with sour cream or yogurt on top, drizzled with remaining strawberry mixture.

Makes 2 servings

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Nutritional information

Calories	324
Fat	3 g
Protein	9.4 g
Carbohydrates	66 g
Fiber	4.2 g
Sodium	750 mg

Resources

Want more information on how to keep your blood pressure and cholesterol in check?

Visit **MiBCN.com**. Select the *I Am a Member* option from the Home page, and then choose *Your Health*. We offer tips under the *Staying Healthy* and *Living with Illness* links.

We also recommend that you visit the Web sites for these organizations:

- American Heart Association
americanheart.org
- CDC Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention
cdc.gov/DHDS

These Web sites are not controlled by BCN, and BCN is not responsible for their content.

Diagnostic information

Understanding your blood pressure reading

A blood pressure reading has two numbers. The top (systolic) number measures the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart beats. The bottom (diastolic) number measures the pressure while your heart rests between beats.

Check out the chart below to see how your blood pressure measures up.

Your blood pressure is	If your systolic number is		Your diastolic number is
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Prehypertension	120 to 139	or	80 to 89
Stage 1 hypertension	140 to 159	or	90 to 99
Stage 2 hypertension	160 or higher	or	100 or higher

Understanding your cholesterol numbers

Doctors measure total cholesterol, low-density lipids (LDL), high-density lipids (HDL) and triglycerides as milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dl). LDL is considered bad cholesterol. HDL is considered good.

Recommended goals are:

- Triglyceride levels less than 150 mg/dL
- Total cholesterol less than 200 mg/dL
- LDL cholesterol below 100 mg/dL (Please check with your doctor about the best level for you.)
- HDL cholesterol greater than 50 mg/dl in women and 40 mg/dL in men