

## **STEP 1**

### **Be Spiritually Active and Reduce Negative Stress**

Making faith an important part of your life can make a huge difference in your physical and emotional health. Many people who have lived to be 100 years old say that their strong religious faith is what brought them so far.

#### **Attend a place of Worship**

Studies have shown that African Americans who attend places of worship regularly may live longer than African Americans who do not. In addition to living longer, they tend to have happier, healthier lives. While faith requires some effort, it brings rich rewards. So, find time in your life to meditate or attend a place of worship. The more spiritually active you are, the more you may benefit.

From communities that provide spiritual and social support to gospel music that uplifts the soul, spirituality is an integral part of African American culture. Being spiritually active helps bring meaning to life. It encourages you to use coping strategies for life's inevitable challenges, and it provides opportunities to reach out to others. These emotional dimensions of health go hand-in-hand with your physical well-being.

#### **Use coping strategies**

Attending a place of worship is one of several different coping strategies that can help keep stress from overpowering you.

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, experiencing stress can be good when it's manageable. Challenge can be motivating and inspiring. Stress may inspire us to wake in the morning, and it can motivate us to take care of our responsibilities. The stress of hard work is a good thing as long as you get satisfaction from it. When stress becomes overwhelming, however, it can be destructive.

To avoid the frustration and depression that can come from destructive stress, you need tools to maintain your emotional strength and resilience. What are the best tools? Attend a place of worship. Have a positive attitude. Know your limits. Express your feelings to understanding friends and family members. Stay active in your community. Care for a child, or adopt a pet. These are all important coping tools.

Reaching out to others is another important strategy for coping. When you reach out, you feel good about yourself and may help others as well. There are many ways to reach out. You might volunteer in the community, or care for a friend or family member. Maybe you listen attentively to others' concerns. You might tutor a school child, help your neighbor with a home repair, or

visit someone who is ill. Learn CPR and how to take an accurate blood pressure measurement so you can help others maintain their health.

You can also reach out to a pet. Studies show that people who own a pet have lower blood pressure and lower cholesterol levels than those without pets. Owning a dog might help motivate you to get out and walk more often. Caring for a pet can also strengthen self-esteem and help decrease feelings of loneliness and isolation. Maybe that's why heart attack victims who have a pet survive much longer than those who do not.

Pursuing hobbies that you enjoy also strengthens your ability to cope. Maybe you like to garden, cook, shoot a basketball, play music, paint, play tennis or golf, or work with wood. Find time for the activities that you most enjoy and be willing to try out some new ones.

As Dr. Malcolm Taylor reminds us, "If you have God, family and friends - you may stumble but will never hit the ground."

### **Laughter it is Good Medicine**

*For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name.*

-Psalm 33:21

Actually, there is nothing wrong with either laughing or crying. They are expressions of honest human emotions that can make you feel less frustrated and less angry.

Crying is a way of letting the hurt out. Even people of great faith, like King David, knew the power of lamentation. A laugh, on the other hand, is like sunshine on a cloudy day. Life without laughter is dreary. An honest laugh cheers us. It is the music, the gospel chorus, of our conversations. Laughter among friends is the glue that holds people together. Victor Hugo said, "I like laughter that opens the lips and the heart, and reveals at the same time, the pearls of the soul."

In his book, *Laughter is the Best Medicine*, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, explains that certain disease ailments respond to a healthy emotional attitude, which can be prompted by laughter. A well-known writer has similarly described how he helped himself recover from cancer by watching old Bill Cosby and Rip Wilson videos.

Scientists are now discovering that laughter and a positive attitude can increase the release of endorphins and promote the manufacture of T-cells. Endorphins make us feel good and decrease our sensitivity to pain. T-cells act like sentinels in our blood to remove harmful microorganisms and cells. Chronic depression can actually weaken your immune system and lower your endorphin level.

When you laugh, electrical impulses are triggered and chemicals released into your blood stream

that dull pain and tranquilize the soul. Other substances that are released with laughter improve digestion; make blood vessels relax to improve circulation, and lower blood pressure.

A philosopher said over a hundred years ago, “Laughter is the most healthful exercise. It is one of the greatest things that help the digestion with which I am acquainted. It stirs up the blood, expands the chest, electrifies the nerves and clears away the cobwebs from the brain. It is the cheapest luxury man enjoys.”

### **Recipe For Healthy Living**

Here’s a simple recipe to promote a healthy lifestyle. If you practice these steps you will experience the fullness and richness in life we all seek.

- 1 ounce of prevention (much better than a pound of cure)
- 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day
- 8 glasses of water
- A dozen good friends (relatives are okay as well)
- 30 minutes of exercise per day - any kind of exercise
- 4 cups of laughter (no substitutions)
- 1 mustard seed of faith
- 2 tablespoons of patience (add more if you have children)

Add a dash of adventure (fun can be substituted, but increase the amount). Also, add a bunch of love (enough to share). Mix well and live long.

The following ingredients are known to ruin your recipe!

- Couch potatoes
- Excessive alcohol
- Smoking
- Stress
- Negative thinking
- Negative attitude
- Excessive fats and sugar in your diet
- Complaining attitude
- Unforgiving spirit
- No social interaction

A wise man once said “As a man thinks, so is he”; truer words were never spoken. What you put into your vessel will bear fruit so make sure that your vessel is getting a good recipe everyday.

### **My spiritual engagement and coping strategies**

*Put a check beside the items that apply to you, and note your own activities in the spaces provided.*

- I attend a place of worship regularly.
- I meditate or pray frequently.
- I volunteer in the following activities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- I serve my community in the following ways: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- I reach out and care for others in these ways: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- I enjoy these hobbies and activities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- I will explore these new activities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- I manage to maintain a positive attitude most of the time.
- I understand that nobody's perfect and set realistic goals for myself and for others.
- I am using these coping strategies: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- I will adopt these new coping strategies: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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*We don't have to be perfect to feel good about ourselves... Really good baseball players only hit successfully 3 out of 10 times at bat!*

## STEP 2

### Take Charge of Your Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels. As your heart pumps blood to all parts of your body, it creates this force in your arteries and other blood vessels. If the force is too strong or if your blood vessels are constricted, you have **high blood pressure**.

High blood pressure - also called hypertension - is previously known as the “silent killer.” Many people with high blood pressure may feel healthy and do not may not know they have it. But if it’s left untreated, high blood pressure can cause a heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, blindness, or even death.

African Americans are at higher risk for this serious disease than any other group. In fact, one-third of adult African Americans have high blood pressure! African Americans also tend to develop high blood pressure at a younger age than other groups, and it tends to be more severe.

Most people with high blood pressure do not have any symptoms, so the only way to know you have this disease is to have your blood pressure measured. Fortunately, this is easy to do, painless, and takes only a minute or two.

As an African American, one of the most important things you can do for your health is to get your blood pressure checked regularly. Even if you are young and feel healthy, have your blood pressure checked at least once a year. Don’t be misled if you feel good on the outside—it’s how healthy your blood vessels are, and how you look on the inside that is important.

If you already have high blood pressure, you should get it checked more often. Consider buying an inexpensive automatic blood pressure machine that lets you measure your blood pressure daily and provides a print-out of the results. In addition to your doctor’s office or neighborhood clinic, you can get your blood pressure checked at some health clubs, shopping malls, pharmacies, or special events, such as a health fair at your church or other place of worship.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle is important for anyone with high blood pressure. But in addition to a healthy lifestyle, most people who have high blood pressure also need to take medications. Your health care provider can advise you about the many effective blood pressure medications that are available.

### Measuring Blood pressure

Your blood pressure measurement includes two numbers, such as 120/80 mm Hg.

- The top or higher number is the amount of pressure while your heart is pumping blood. This

is called the **systolic pressure**.

- The bottom or lower number is the amount of pressure when your heart rests between beats. This is the **diastolic pressure**.

A healthy blood pressure for an adult is below 120/80 mm Hg. Over time, high blood pressure damages your arteries and organs, which can lead to heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, and other health problems. Even borderline blood pressure levels (starting at 120/80 mm Hg but less than 140/90 mm Hg) may increase your risk of health problems. This is called hypertension.

Remember, you can look and feel fine but still have high blood pressure. Don't wait until the damage starts before you find out you're at risk! Simply get your blood pressure checked each year. Even children should have their blood pressure checked annually, as part of a preventive health exam.

### **Blood pressure categories (for ages 18 and over)**

Category	Systolic	Diastolic
Normal	Below 120	Below 80
Prehypertension*	120-139	80-89
High Mood pressure	140 or higher	90 or higher

Source: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

\*Indicates increase risk for developing high blood pressure.

**My blood pressure record:** *Each time you have your blood pressure checked, record the results here.*

Date	Blood Pressure	Category (Normal, borderline or high?)

**Controlling blood pressure:** *Use the checklist below to examine what you are doing to help*

*keep your blood pressure under control.*

- I get my blood pressure checked at least once a year.
- If my blood pressure tends to be higher than 120/80 mm Hg, I get it measured more than once a year and I have talked with my health care provider about ways to control it.
- I am spiritually active.
- I have strategies for coping with emotional challenges.
- I exercise regularly.
- I eat foods that are low in fat and sodium.
- I eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- I am maintaining a healthy weight.
- If overweight, I am losing weight slowly.



## **STEP 3**

### **Control Your Cholesterol**

Do you know your cholesterol levels? You should. Monitoring your cholesterol is extremely important, because high blood cholesterol can lead to coronary heart disease, which is the leading cause of death among African Americans.

#### **What is coronary heart disease?**

Your blood carries oxygen and nutrients to your heart through muscular tubes called coronary arteries. Like your kitchen sink, these arteries can become narrowed or clogged by cholesterol and fat deposits which is known as atherosclerosis. The result is coronary heart disease.

If you have coronary heart disease, you may experience chest pain called angina when too little blood is reaching your heart. A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to part of your heart is completely blocked.

Atherosclerosis and hypertension can also lead to a stroke, which occurs when a blood vessel in the brain gets clogged or ruptures

This is a “brain attack.” Other risks from coronary heart disease include poor circulation in the legs, or peripheral vascular disease (PAD), and kidney failure.

#### **What is cholesterol?**

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that is naturally produced and stored in the liver. It’s in the cells of your brain, muscles, skin, heart, and everywhere else that your blood flows. Your body needs cholesterol to function normally, but you only need a small amount in your bloodstream.

If you have too much blood cholesterol, your body stores extra cholesterol in your arteries, including the coronary (heart) arteries. Cholesterol build-up narrows and clogs the arteries, resulting in heart disease. The higher your cholesterol level is, the greater your risk for heart disease.

#### **Good and bad cholesterol**

*There are two main types of cholesterol:*

1. LDL is often called bad cholesterol, because it lays down fatty deposits in the arteries that feed your heart and brain. Too much of it puts you at risk for heart disease and stroke. Eating foods that are high in saturated fats, such as high-fat meats, whole milk, cheese, and butter,

can increase your LDL, or “bad” cholesterol levels. Trans-fats found in margarine, lard, and shortening, may also raise your LDL.

2. HDL is called good cholesterol, because it helps clean fat and “bad” cholesterol away from the arteries. Having a high HDL level lowers the risk of heart attack and stroke, and having a low level of HDL increases your risk. Being physically active can help raise your HDL.

**Measuring blood cholesterol**

Measuring blood cholesterol

Your health care provider can do a lipoprotein profile to measure your total cholesterol, HDL, and LDL levels. Starting at age 20, you should have this test at least every five years. Anyone with high cholesterol, diabetes, or certain other conditions should have it more often. Talk with your health care provider about how often you should have a lipoprotein profile.

If your total cholesterol or LDL levels are too high, or if your HDL level is too low, your doctor may prescribe medicine to help bring your cholesterol to a healthier level.

**Cholesterol Tests: What The Numbers Mean\***

<b><i>If TOTAL cholesterol is:</i></b>		
Below 200	Desirable	Great! Keep below this number.
200-239	Borderline	Make changes in your lifestyle to decrease risk of a heart attack.
240 or higher	High	Danger! Seek medical help to lower your cholesterol level.
<b><i>If LDL is:</i></b>		
Less than 100	Optimal	Aim for low LDL.
100-129	Near optimal	
130-159	Borderline high	
160-189	Too high	
190 or higher	Much too high	
<b><i>If HDL is:</i></b>		
60 or higher	Optimal	Aim for high HDL.
40-59	Borderline	
Less than 40	Too low	Less than 50 is too low for women

\*Measurements represent milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) Source: www.nhlbi.nih.gov

**My Cholesterol Levels (mg/dL):** *Each time you have your cholesterol checked, record the results below. Bring this chart to your next healthcare exam and discuss the results with your doctor.*

<b>Dale</b>	<b>Total cholesterol</b>	<b>HDL</b>	<b>LDL</b>

### **Controlling cholesterol**

Some of the factors that determine cholesterol levels are beyond our control, for example, your genes influence how high your LDL is by helping to determine how fast your body makes LDL and removes it from the blood. Below the age of menopause, women usually have lower cholesterol levels than men of the same age. The effects of elevated cholesterol can begin in the teenage or young adult years.

At any age, however, following a healthy lifestyle is very important for controlling your cholesterol level. That means staying active both physically and spiritually. It means limiting the amount of fat you eat and the amount of alcohol you drink, and it means losing weight if you are overweight.

Controlling cholesterol: Put a check mark beside the practices that you are following in your daily life.

**Controlling cholesterol:** *Put a check mark beside the practices that you are following in your daily life.*

*Aim to check every box.*

- I am managing the stress in my life by being spiritually active and using coping strategies.
- I avoid foods that are high in saturated fat
- I limit trans-fats in my diet which is often used in fried foods and baked goods.
- I try not to eat foods that are high in dietary cholesterol.
- I exercise at least five days a week.
- I am not overweight (or I am succeeding in losing weight).
- I don't overindulge in alcohol.

### **Checking triglycerides**

The lipoprotein profile that measures your cholesterol levels will also measure your triglycerides. Triglycerides are fatty substances that your liver makes from the food you eat.

People who are obese or have diabetes are likely to have high triglyceride levels. Recent studies show a strong link between high triglyceride levels and the risk of heart disease.

**Triglyceride Levels (mg/dL)**

Normal	Less than 150 mg/dL
Borderline risk	150-199 mg/dL
High risk	200-499 mg/dL
Very high risk	More than 500 mg/dL

Each time you have your triglycerides measured, use the table below to record the results.

**My Triglyceride Levels (mg/dL)**

Date						
Triglyceride level						

If your levels are above 150 mg/dL, ask your health care provider about ways to reduce your triglycerides. In general, you need to do the same things you would do to reduce cholesterol - stick to a healthy low-fat diet and get plenty of exercise. In addition, you need to limit sugar and other carbohydrates in your diet, and if you smoke, you need to quit **now!** Your health care provider might also determine that you need to take medication to help control high triglyceride levels.

## **STEP 4**

### **Track Your Blood Sugar**

Diabetes is the disease people get when their body has trouble making or using insulin, so too much sugar builds up in their blood. Having too much blood sugar is very bad for the heart, the kidneys, and other vital organs.

Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the U.S., and African Americans die from diabetes 27 percent more often than whites! Furthermore, diabetes is a leading cause of heart attack, stroke, and other serious health problems, including kidney disease, impotence, blindness and amputations. Each year, more than 250,000 Americans who have diabetes and 2 out of 3 die of heart disease or stroke!

There are two main types of diabetes: Type 1 and Type 2. People with Type 1 diabetes need to take insulin to stay alive. Most people have Type 2. In fact, about 95% of African Americans who have diabetes have Type 2 diabetes.

Regular exercise and a healthy, low-fat diet is very important for helping to prevent Type 2 diabetes. In our culture, we eat too much fatty food and we don't get enough exercise, so more and more of us are overweight, and more and more Americans are getting diabetes.

There's no cure for diabetes. If you have diabetes, however, keeping your blood sugar level under control can be a big help in preventing heart disease and other complications. That means watching your diet, exercising, controlling your weight, and taking medication if necessary.

### **Testing for diabetes**

Many people with diabetes don't even realize they have it until it becomes life-threatening or leads to a serious complication. The only way to find out for sure whether you have diabetes is to have a blood test. Talk with your health care provider about whether you should have a diabetes blood test called a fasting plasma glucose test.

This test measures the amount of glucose, or sugar, in your blood on an empty stomach. Your doctor will ask you not to eat for at least 8 to 10 hours before the test. The results will fit into one of the four categories shown below.

### **Fasting Plasma Glucose Test Results (mg/dL)**

If your blood sugar is in the 70 - 99 it is considered normal. Blood sugar in the 100 to 125 mg/dL range, it is too high to be called healthy but too low to be called diabetes. Instead, you have a condition called impaired glucose tolerance. Like those with diabetes, a blood sugar that is 126 or greater, people with impaired glucose tolerance are at high risk for heart attack and stroke. In

fact, most people with impaired glucose tolerance eventually develop Type 2 diabetes.

- I have talked with my health care provider about whether I should have a fasting plasma glucose test. (If the answer is “yes,” record your results below.)

**My blood sugar test results (mg/dL)**

Date of test	Result (mg/dL)	My blood sugar measurement falls into this category (Put a check mark in the appropriate column)		
		Healthy/ Normal (70-99)	Impaired glucose tolerance (100-125)	Diabetes (126 or higher)

**Managing Diabetes: A1c Tests**

People with diabetes check their blood sugar several times a day by pricking their finger, drawing a drop of blood, and using a small glucose meter to measure the sugar level in the drop of blood.

In addition to monitoring blood sugar at home, anyone with diabetes or high glucose levels should have regular health check-ups that include a blood test called a hemoglobin A1c (A1c). If you have diabetes, expect to have the A1c test two to four times a year.

The A1c test is the best way to tell how well you are doing at controlling your glucose and insulin levels. If you get a result of less than 7%, you are probably doing well. Ask your doctor what results you should expect and what they mean for you. Record your results on the following chart.

**My A1c test results**

Exam Date					
A1c (Aim for less than 7%)					

Source: [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

## **Prevention and control**

No matter what your blood test results, your lifestyle is the key to preventing diabetes, or managing it if you already have it.

Recently, a major study showed that if you have impaired glucose tolerance, simple changes in your diet and exercise routines can prevent diabetes. In the National Institutes of Health's Diabetes Prevention Program, exercise and weight loss reduced the risk of diabetes by nearly 60 percent among people with impaired glucose tolerance.

Why is weight control so important for preventing or controlling diabetes? Because having too much body fat makes it harder for the body to produce the insulin it needs. This is especially true if the extra fat is above the hips, rather than on the hips and thighs. Researchers have found that this type of obesity is especially common among African Americans.

Even if you aren't obese, you can get diabetes from sitting around too much, not exercising enough, and consuming a high-calorie diet. A lifestyle that adds body fat increases your risk of diabetes, which adds to your risk of heart disease.

As you lose fat and build muscle, your body uses insulin better. And for most people, losing just a few pounds is enough to make a huge difference. In its Diabetes Prevention Program, the National Institutes of Health found that for most people, losing just 10 pounds is enough to cut the risk of diabetes by 58 percent!

No question, the way to prevent diabetes is to stay active, eat smart, and keep your weight down - the same things that help maintain a healthy heart.

You have now completed Step 4 of the Seven Steps to a Healthy Heart. You know the importance of staying spiritually active and using coping strategies. Are you also following these heart-health ABC's?

- A1c test.** Have your blood sugar tested. If you have high blood sugar or diabetes, have an A1c test two to four times per year.
- Blood pressure.** Get your blood pressure checked at least once a year.
- Cholesterol.** Have a lipoprotein profile at least once every five years, and more often if recommended by your healthcare provider.

The rest of this book will provide the tips you need to eat smart, enjoy regular exercise, manage your weight, not smoke and access better healthcare.

So, on to step 5!

## STEP 5

### **Eat Smart & Enjoy Regular Exercise**

A traditional “healthy” breakfast used to be eggs, bacon, sausage, pancakes, hash browns, and buttered biscuits. But now we know that a bowl of whole grain cereal with a sliced banana and skim milk is a much more healthy breakfast. In fact, there are many delicious options. Try fresh blueberries on almond granola with skim milk or with yogurt. Be creative— it’s fun and it’s healthier. Eating smart means eating foods that are low in fat and rich in nutrients. It means eating lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. And most importantly, drink pure, clean, cold refreshing water.

Eating right isn’t just about living longer. It’s about feeling good. It’s about staying healthy and vigorous even as you age. Smart eating helps you avoid having a heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, or diabetes. It helps to prevent suffering and increase the healthy years that lie ahead.

Eating smart also means not eating too much. It means having the strength to resist people who push the food they’ve prepared for you. Beware of food pushers. Don’t let anyone make you feel guilty about limiting how much you eat! And don’t feel compelled to eat what the kids leave on the table. It’s better to throw away food than to eat extra stuff that you don’t need.

### **Cut fat and cholesterol**

Eating too much saturated fat can clog your arteries and lead to a heart attack or stroke. Saturated fat raises your “bad” cholesterol levels more than other types of fat. To reduce saturated fat in your diet, eat less butter, cheese, whole milk, lard, and fatty cuts of meat.

Trans-fats are fats that have been converted into solids by a process. Trans-fats may also raise your bad cholesterol levels. To reduce trans-fats in your diet, eat less margarine, shortening, and snacks or desserts that contain hydrogenated vegetable oil. Ask a nutrition advisor about healthy alternatives to butter and margarine.

**Dietary cholesterol** is in foods that come from animals. Meats, poultry, and dairy products contain high levels of dietary cholesterol in addition to saturated fat. Foods that are especially high in dietary cholesterol include egg yolks and organ meats, such as liver and kidney. There is no dietary cholesterol in foods that come from plants, including fruits, vegetables and grains.

**Monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats** are preferred and may lower LDL cholesterol. Canola, olive, and peanut oils are high in monounsaturated fat. Sesame and sunflower oils are high in polyunsaturated fat.

Food labels show the amount of various types of fat in each serving as a percentage of total daily calories. Limit polyunsaturated fat to 10 percent of your total daily calories. Another 10 to 15



percent of total calories can come from monounsaturated fat.

### **Enjoy fruits and vegetables**

The easiest way to cut fat and cholesterol is to fill up on your favorite fruits and vegetables. Also try to eat whole grains, such as whole wheat bread, oatmeal, and whole grain cereals. Beans are also healthy and a good source of protein.

Try to eat at least five servings a day of fruits and vegetables. If you've ever gone on a "diet," you know that it's not easy to change how you eat. You may need support from friends or family members in your effort to change. You can also get support from your health care provider.

To help keep your blood pressure down, eat less sodium. Too much sodium is the main factor that may lead to hypertension in many persons, especially, African Americans and those who are overweight or obese. Food labels tell how much sodium is in a product. Instead of using convenience foods that are high in sodium, prepare your own meals from scratch. Try not to cook with much salt. Instead, use spices, herbs, and salt-free seasoning blends.

#### **"LIMIT AMOUNT OF ALL OF THESE" FOODS\***

Bacon  
Sausage  
Egg yolks  
Hash browns  
French fries  
Fried food  
Cheeseburgers  
Hot dogs  
Potato chips  
Donuts  
Salami/bologna  
Pizza  
Whole milk  
Cream  
Butter  
Candy  
Soft Drinks

#### **"INCREASE THE AMOUNTS OF THESE" FOODS**

Oatmeal or other  
Whole grain cereals  
Whole wheat bread  
Rye bread  
Baked potato  
Sweet potato or yams  
Grilled or baked foods  
Yogurt Fish  
Turkey (skinless)  
Chicken (skinless)  
Garlic, onions  
Salad  
Carrots, broccoli, and other vegetables  
Apples, bananas, and other fruits  
Skim milk  
Fruit juice  
Water

**My fruit and vegetable record:** *Record the fruits, vegetables, and grains you eat for the next two weeks. Try to have at least five servings a day.*

Date	Serving 1	Serving 2	Serving 3	Serving 4	Serving 5

**Enjoy Regular Exercise**

If you think aging has to mean growing more sedentary or becoming disabled and useless, think again.

No matter what your age, you can continue to enjoy going out, making new friends, singing and dancing, gardening, and many other ways of staying active and having fun. Regular physical activity can help you feel better, stay healthier, and perform tasks better at any age.

Staying physically active can lower your blood pressure and your LDL “bad” cholesterol level. It can raise your HDL “good” cholesterol level and lower your triglycerides. It helps keep blood sugar under control to prevent the serious complications of diabetes. Exercise is also crucial if you need to lose weight, and it’s a wonderful way to help keep stress from overpowering you.

Every little bit of exercise helps a little bit. So, resist the temptation to take the escalator instead of the stairs, or to park right next to your doorway. Resist the temptation to ride in a wheel chair if you can manage without it. You don’t have to let society turn you into an invalid!

**Exercise daily**

To help make regular exercise a lifelong habit, consider exercising with a family member or a friend. You might like to talk with your friends while walking around the neighborhood together. Maybe you could start an exercise group at your place of worship. Or maybe you have a dog to

walk. Even if you don't have an exercise partner, there are a lot of ways to make physical activity a part of your everyday life.

Consider adding some of these activities to your daily routine. Put a check mark beside the activities that appeal to you.

- Get off the bus one or two stops early so that you end up walking farther.
- Park at the far end of the parking lot, or park a few blocks away from your destination and walk.
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Get up 15 minutes earlier in the morning and stretch.
- Work out along with an exercise video.
- Play your favorite dance music. Do the steps you know and enjoy, and add some new moves.
- Play tag or other active games with your grandchildren.
- Ride a stationary bike while watching TV.
- Keep a pair of walking shoes at your office, and take walks during lunch or breaks, either on your own or with a co-worker.

### **Follow an exercise plan**

No matter what your age, try to be active for at least 30 minutes a day. You can do activities by yourself or with others. You can do 30 minutes all at once, or you can exercise two or three times a day for 10-20 minutes at a time. If you have a health problem, be sure to talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.

The key to a successful exercise program is to find the activities that you enjoy doing and that fit into your daily routine. Which of the activities below would you like to include in your plan?

#### **MODERATE ACTIVITIES**

Walking  
Gardening  
Dancing  
Vacuuming  
Raking leaves  
Climbing stairs  
Yoga  
Bowling  
Golf

#### **VIGOROUS ACTIVITIES**

Bicycling  
Jogging or running  
Walking at a brisk pace  
Aerobics  
Swimming or water aerobics  
Basketball  
Soccer or football  
Baseball  
Tennis

Use the list above to help select the activities that you want to include in your exercise plan. Also talk with your health care provider about which types of exercise would be best for you. If you aren't used to exercising, start with moderate activities and work your way up to more vigorous

activities.

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### **My exercise plan**

**My exercise record:** Once you have an exercise plan, use the table below to track your progress. Try to be active for a total of 30 minutes (or longer) everyday.

Date	Activity	Total minutes	Date	Activity	Total minutes

### **Manage Your Weight**

You're not alone if you are carrying around extra pounds. Unfortunately, nearly 2 out of 3 adults in the United States are overweight or obese, according to the Surgeon General's latest report. The rates are even higher among African Americans, especially African American women.

Don't be misled by magazines that promote being large as attractive. Obesity is not a beauty issue. It's a health issue.

The most important reason to lose weight is that you'll feel better and stay healthier. Having extra body fat can lead to a heart attack, stroke, diabetes and other serious health problems. Losing even just a small amount of weight is likely to help in several ways. Losing weight helps to:

- Lower your blood pressure (thus decreasing your risk of heart attack and stroke).
- Reduce LDL "bad" cholesterol and triglycerides (thus decreasing your risk of cardiovascular disease).
- Keep your blood sugar from rising (thus decreasing your risk of diabetes)
- Increase self-esteem.
- Decrease depression.
- Reduce your risk of arthritis.

Your genes, your environment, and emotional factors can all contribute to obesity. No matter what the causes are, it boils down to this: You are taking in more calories than you use.

## **STEP 6**

### **Don't Smoke**

Cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health. More than 390,000 people die each year from cigarette smoking because of lung cancer and premature death from heart diseases. Smoking also causes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Reports have shown that persons who have stopped smoking for five years, lungs heal and look almost brand new, just as if they had never smoked. The Surgeon General of the United States warns that cigarette smoking is harmful to your health and can cause death. In addition, smoking during pregnancy may cause damage to the unborn baby.

Passive smoking (inhaling someone else's smoke), causes 5,000 lung cancer and heart disease deaths each year. Not the least of the reasons to stop smoking is: it makes your clothing and hair smell bad; wrinkles your skin; wastes money stains your teeth; makes food tasteless; and makes you cough.

If you smoke and want to stop, use the following tips to help you:

1. Set a date to quit.
2. Inform friends, family, and coworkers of your plan to quit and ask for their support.
3. Throw away cigarettes, matches, and lighters in your home and car.
4. Review previous quit attempts. Try to assess why they failed, and what you can do to avoid those obstacles.
5. Anticipate challenges and plan what to do instead of smoking.
6. Keep busy and have a supply of low calorie snacks on hand.

## STEP 7

### Access Better Healthcare

Despite steady improvement in the overall health of the U.S. population. African Americans experience the highest rates of mortality from heart disease, cancer, stroke, and HIV/AIDS than any other U.S. racial or ethnic group. The reasons for these health status disparities are complex and poorly understood, but may largely reflect differences in socioeconomic status, health related risk factors, environmental degradation, as well as direct and indirect consequences of discrimination.

### Common Barriers to Equal Access to Healthcare

- **Lack of healthcare insurance** - Lack of health coverage has consequences for uninsured individuals, the health care system, and society as a whole. The uninsured are more likely to encounter difficulty obtaining care and use fewer health care services. Many of the uninsured go without needed primary and preventive care that may avert a serious health crisis.
- **Geographic** - The location of the healthcare provider is often a barrier. In urban settings, a person may have to take two buses and the subway to get to their doctor. People living in rural communities may have to travel several miles to a larger town to get appropriate care.
- **Language and culture** - Effective communication can be difficult if the language and/or culture of the patient and the healthcare provider are different.
- **Low Health Literacy** - Understanding medical terminology can be intimidating for some people. Take the time to read educational brochures that you run across. They will help increase your health literacy, and guide you in understanding which questions to ask. It is important to become an active partner with your doctor. Ask questions until you get satisfactory answers. Remember, the best doctors are only human, so the more you understand your own condition, the better equipped you will be to help manage it.

Some people are fearful of doctors and healthcare establishments. In some cases, the fear stems from the re-telling of stories about negative experiences (real and Imagined) of other people. You should not assume that your experiences will mirror those of your parents or grandparents. Trusting in God's almighty power and love for his children allows us to overcome our fears about what might happen to us.

You should not ignore health problems no matter how big or small. Denial will not make a problem go away. It is very important that you keep track of your health status. You must resist the temptation to believe that what you don't know can't hurt you.

Take advantage of any medical benefits provided by your employer. Everyone, no matter how

healthy should see a doctor every 1-3 years depending upon age and medical history. This will allow you to identify problems early, and have more options for treatment. A clean bill of health at age 40 does not automatically mean that it will be clean at age 50. You must check in periodically with a healthcare provider to know for sure.

If you don't already have a healthcare provider that you see regularly, it's time to find one. You need someone with whom you feel comfortable. Think of it as a partnership: You and your doctor are working on a project together, and the project is your health. Before each visit, write down a list of the questions you have. Then, make sure you get answers to all your questions. It may be helpful to bring a friend along. If there isn't time to get all the answers you need, talk with your doctor about this. If he or she isn't responsive, it may be time to find a different healthcare provider.

**Identify public clinics in your community.** Take advantage of the health services they provide. Do not be discouraged if there are long wait times and less than friendly service. These are barriers that you must overcome to ensure better health for you and your family.

### **Congratulations!**

By reading this booklet and using the charts, you have taken a giant step toward a healthier heart. Be encouraged even if you are finding that you need to make a lot of changes in your lifestyle. Nobody expects you to make all of these changes overnight. But remember, every little bit helps. Every step you take in the right direction will make it that much easier to take the next step.

You're not just doing this for yourself. You're taking care of yourself for your family, and for all of your loved ones. Take pride in your accomplishments.

### **You deserve it!**

#### Disclaimer:

This guidebook is intended for informational purposes only, with the understanding that no one should rely upon this information as the basis for medical decisions. Anyone requiring medical or other healthcare should consult a medical or healthcare professional. Any actions based on the information provided herein are entirely the responsibility of the user and/or of any medical or other healthcare professionals who advised such actions. Anyone who uses the suggested dietary and physical activity/exercise areas in this guidebook should consult a medical or healthcare provider before starting a diet or physical activity/exercise program.

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## **RESOURCES**

### **American Diabetes Association (ADA)**

1-703-549-1500 1-800-DIABETES

[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

### **American Dietetic Association**

National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics Information

1-800-366-1655

[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

### **American Heart Association**

1-800-242-8721

[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

### **American Kidney Fund**

1-800-638-8299

[www.kidneyfund.org](http://www.kidneyfund.org)

### **American Stroke Association, a division of the American Heart Association**

1-888-4STROKE (1-888-478-7653)

[www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org)

### **Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc. (ABC)**

1-800-753-9222

[www.abc cardio.org](http://www.abc cardio.org)

### **Association of Black Psychologists**

1-202-722-0808

[www.abpsi.org](http://www.abpsi.org)