

7 steps to a heart-healthy lifestyle



The 2019 American College of Cardiology (ACC)/American Heart Association (AHA) Guidelines on Primary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease were released at the recent ACC annual scientific meeting in New Orleans. The guidelines focus on the importance of adhering to a heart-healthy lifestyle and eating a healthy diet while maintaining a physically active lifestyle. The guidelines also have new recommendations regarding the use of aspirin for the primary prevention of cardiovascular disease.

Here are seven steps to a heart-healthy living as outlined in the new ACC/AHA 2019 guidelines:

1. **Eat a heart-healthy diet** that includes a healthy mix of fruits vegetables, legumes, nuts, and whole grains. Cut down the consumption of sweetened drinks, processed foods, high-sodium foods and foods that contain trans fats and saturated fats.
2. **Maintain a physically active lifestyle**. Make sure you include at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise a week. This could include a brisk walk or 75 minutes of high-intensity exercise such as rowing, basketball, etc. Ensure that you are physically active every day of the week and do not limit yourself to exercising only 1 or 2 days a week.
3. **Quit smoking**. Smoking is a reversible risk factor for cardiovascular disease. If you want to prevent CVD, it's best that you stay away from smoking.
4. **Get your cholesterol level checked regularly**. If your cholesterol level is high, your doctor may choose to put you on medical therapy or may conduct further testing to determine the level of calcification in the blood vessels. In any case, maintaining healthy cholesterol levels is essential for minimising the risk of cardiovascular disease.
5. **Keep an eye on your blood pressure**. A healthy blood pressure of <130/80 should be maintained. You can easily manage this if you follow a healthy lifestyle - a low sodium diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables and regular physical activity.
6. **Maintain your blood sugar level** as this is essential for adequate control of Type 2 Diabetes. Again, a heart-healthy diet outlined in the guidelines should be sufficient to ensure that your blood sugar level is well-maintained. For those already diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, the first line of treatment is metformin while drugs such as SGLT-2 inhibitor and GLP-1 receptor agonists are secondary line of treatment options. Diabetes should be controlled if you want to prevent the development of cardiovascular disease.
7. As per the new guidelines, the use of aspirin is not encouraged in individuals who have a low CV risk profile as there is an increased risk of bleeding associated with this drug. This risk outweighs the preventive benefits of aspirin. That is why the **use of aspirin** should be reserved for patients who are at risk of cardiovascular disease. Patients should discuss the use of aspirin with their doctor before starting or stopping aspirin treatment.

Overall, the seven steps outlined above are essential if you want to prevent cardiovascular disease and if you want to live a healthy life.

Source: [ACC/AHA guidelines](#), [Heart.org](#)

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