

CARDIO- VASCULAR DISEASE

SPRING 2021



Information to help you improve your health from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

Cardiovascular disease, also known as heart disease, can refer to any number of diseases and conditions that affect your heart and circulatory system. Many of these conditions lead to a narrowing of the blood vessels or blockages in your arteries which can cause heart attacks, angina (chest pain) or strokes. Cardiovascular disease may also involve irregular heartbeat, cardiac infections and structural defects of the heart.

Using diet & exercise to HELP YOUR HEART

Not only do diet and exercise help your heart, they can prevent or provide maintenance for many chronic illnesses, including diabetes.

Following are a few guidelines regarding diet and exercise for a healthier heart.

- **Meals should consist** of fruits, vegetables, grains and lean proteins.
- **Avoid processed foods.**
- **These heart-healthy eating plans** can be found for free online: the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), the Swedish diet and the Mediterranean diet.
- Overly restrictive diets can be hard to follow. **Find a plan that works for you.**
- **If you slip up one day**, don't give up. Just start fresh the next day.
- **Everyone benefits from exercise.** Start with a weekly minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity.
- **It takes time to warm up** your aerobic system, so any session under 10 minutes is ineffective.
- **If you can't do 30 minutes at once, don't sweat it!** Adding in little bits of exercise throughout your week can add up to huge health benefits.

It's always a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise plan or diet.



[AlabamaBlue.com](https://alabamablue.com)

The truth about heart failure: WHAT YOU CAN DO

Even though it is a serious medical condition, heart failure doesn't have to stop you from enjoying life.

Learning common causes and symptoms can help you manage this condition.



A healthy heart pumps oxygen-rich blood continuously throughout your body. When a person has heart failure, it means their heart is having difficulty pumping enough oxygenated blood to all parts of the body.

Heart failure occurs when the muscles of the heart can't send enough blood to your body. The heart tries to adjust by doing one or more of the following:

- ♥ **Your heart enlarges** to push more blood through your veins
- ♥ **Your heartbeat may increase** in an attempt to deliver blood to your body.
- ♥ **Blood vessels may narrow** as your body tries to increase your blood pressure.
- ♥ **Blood may be diverted from vital organs** like the kidneys and brain, causing damage to those organs.

All these can cause symptoms which make you feel bad. Here are the seven most common symptoms of heart failure:

1. **Weakness or fatigue**
2. **Breathing issues**
3. **Coughing**
4. **Chest pain**
5. **Water retention/swelling**, especially in the feet or legs
6. **Excessive urination**
7. **Heart palpitations** (irregular heartbeat)

Usually, it's only *after* these symptoms occur that people see a doctor, but heart disease can be caught and treated through early detection. *This is why regular checkups with your doctor are so important.*

The good news is that by working with your doctor, heart disease can be better managed today than ever before. And don't deal with it alone. A healthy social network of supportive family and friends can be great medicine.



Have questions
related to your health?

TAKE CONTROL

with our exclusive **Chronic Condition Coaching** program.

Call **1-888-841-5741** for information and to talk to a clinician.

Understand your emotions and SHOW YOUR HEART SOME LOVE

In literature, there's always been a connection between the heart and feelings. Many cultures consider the heart the home of our emotions.

Although modern science has shown feelings actually come from our brain and nervous system, there is a very real connection between the heart and our emotions.

With a diagnosis of heart failure or heart disease, you may be feeling anxious about your future, worried your body is turning against you, angry you can't do as much as you used to do, and lonely, like no one understands what you're dealing with.

Research has shown that people with more positive outlooks and stronger social networks are more likely to take medicines as prescribed and live healthy, active lives.

So, believe it or not, your heart and emotions really *are* connected. This is good news, because managing your emotions and finding ways to be more positive can be good for your heart.

How can you better control your emotions?

- **Accept and understand your feelings.** You can better manage what you fully understand.
- **Find ways to relax.** Guided meditation and breathing exercises can be used to help manage stress.
- **Stop unhealthy habits.** If you smoke or drink too much, quit.
- **Eat healthy and exercise.** If you treat yourself better, you might just start to feel better.
- **Make sure you are getting enough sleep.**
- **Socialize frequently** with friends and loved ones. If you need to reach outside your inner circle, consider joining a support group or finding a hobby with a club to enjoy.
- **Set goals for yourself** to incorporate the healthy habits outlined above and start making positive changes in your life.
- **Find your purpose.** As long as you're breathing, you're here for a reason.



Most of all, don't ignore your feelings. Sometimes your feelings can cause physical symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia or sleeping too much, weight loss, and just feeling bad in general.

If you experience any of these symptoms for more than two weeks, call your doctor.



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Eligible members have access
to our free nurse phone lines.
Call **1-888-841-5741** for
more information.

COVID-19 UPDATE

**The arrival of the first COVID-19
vaccines is a major development in the
fight against the coronavirus pandemic.**

The current vaccines are approximately
95% effective in preventing COVID-19,
and provide a high level of protection
against contracting the virus.

**Getting vaccinated will help keep you
and your family healthy and safe.**

MASK UP. STAY SAFE.

For more information about
the COVID-19 vaccine and
its availability in your area,
contact your physician's office
or local pharmacy. Additional
COVID-19 topics and how the
pandemic could affect you and
your family can be found at
www.cdc.gov/COVID19

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