



Aetna Better Health[®] of Virginia

Heart Health

Spring/Summer 2020

Five easy ways to work out indoors

One of the best gifts you can give your heart is to move more. If you have high blood pressure, regular exercise can help lower it — and keep it in a healthy range. Most adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week.

What if you can't get outside for a fresh-air workout? Maybe the weather is ugly — or the air quality is bad. Maybe being outdoors just isn't convenient that day.

There are lots of ways to get the exercise you need indoors:

Get your groove on. Crank up your favorite music and dance. It's OK to make up your own steps — nobody's looking.

Head to the library. Check out an exercise video. It's like having your own personal trainer for free.

Walk laps at the mall. For an extra challenge, climb the stairs or escalator.

Go to school. See if your local community center offers free or low-cost fitness classes.

Design your own workout. For an at-home circuit workout, mix brief bursts of cardio (like jumping jacks and marching) with strength moves (like situps and squats).

Sources: American Heart Association (Heart.org); Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (Health.gov/PAGuidelines/Second-Edition/)

Four ways to take charge

If you have a chronic condition, take it step by step:

1. Learn all you can about it.
2. Work with your doctor on a care plan.
3. Take your medications.
4. Aim for healthy habits.

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ.gov)



Did you know that you may be able to get Lifeline cell service plus a smartphone at no cost to you? Go to **AetnaBetterHealth.com/Virginia** or call Member Services at **1-800-279-1878** and ask about the Assurance Wireless Lifeline program.



[AetnaBetterHealth.com/Virginia](https://www.aetna.com/virginia)



Watch your weight every day

When you have heart failure, you need to keep an eye on the scale. Sudden weight gain or swelling can mean you are retaining fluid and your condition is getting worse.

Weigh yourself at the same time every day. Ask your doctor when to call about sudden weight gain. For instance, your doctor may ask you to report a weight gain of 2 to 3 pounds in one day or more than 5 pounds in a week.

Watch for swelling. If you notice any new swelling in your belly, legs, ankles or feet, tell your doctor right away.

Treating weight gain and swelling early can help keep it from getting worse. Your doctor might have you:

- Eat less sodium and salt
- Drink less fluid
- Adjust your medicines

Sources: American Heart Association (Heart.org); Heart Failure Society of America (HFSA.org)

Think twice before stopping your medicine

Tempted to stop taking a medicine your doctor prescribed? That's not a good idea, especially if you have heart failure.

Your medicine is a crucial part of your treatment. It protects your heart and helps you lead a full life.

Need some better solutions? Try these:

It's hard to pay for my medicine. Let your doctor know. A different drug may work as well but cost less. There are also programs

that offer discounted or free medicine. Your doctor may help you find one.

I'm not sure how to take my medicine. Ask your doctor or pharmacist questions like:

- How much to take
- What time of day to take it
- What to do if you miss a dose
- Whether to take it with food
- How to know if it's working

It's hard to remember my medicine. It may help to link it

to something else you do every day — like brushing your teeth. Ask your pharmacist about pill organizers or other tools that might help too.

I don't like the side effects. Tell your doctor. A different medicine — or dose — might work better.

Sources: American Heart Association (Heart.org); Heart Failure Society of America (HFSA.org)

Understand your heart meds

Living well with heart disease may mean taking certain medicines. If your doctor prescribes them for you, it's a good idea to understand what they do. For example:

Beta blockers. These drugs take stress off the heart. They help lower blood pressure, which helps the heart beat more slowly and with less force. Doctors also use them to treat abnormal heart rhythms and chest pain.

Blood thinners. Don't let their name mislead you. These drugs don't actually thin blood. Instead, they help keep harmful clots from forming in blood vessels. They can also keep existing clots from getting bigger and more dangerous.

Statins. These medicines help lower LDL, the bad cholesterol. They may also boost HDL, the good kind.

Make the most of your medicine

It's important to take your medicines exactly as prescribed, even if you feel fine. Used the right way, they can help you avoid a heart attack or stroke.

If you're concerned about side effects, tell your doctor. A different dose or medicine may work better. Don't stop your medicine without your doctor's OK.

Sources: American College of Cardiology (CardioSmart.org); American Heart Association (Heart.org)

Diabetes and heart disease: What's the link?

Diabetes and heart disease often go hand in hand. In fact, diabetes makes high blood pressure and high cholesterol more likely.

Many people with diabetes don't know they have it. Instead of taking chances, ask your doctor if you should be tested.

If you do have heart disease and diabetes, there are plenty of ways to stay on top of both conditions. To start:

1. **Set goals.** Ask your doctor what yours should be for blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol and weight. Then work together to reach them.
2. **Have a heart-healthy diet.** That means:
 - Eat lots of fruits, veggies and whole grains.
 - Choose lean cuts of meat and fish and skinless poultry.
 - Stick to fat-free and low-fat dairy products.
 - Go easy on added sugars.
3. **Stay active.** Aim for 150 minutes a week.
4. **Don't light up.** If you need to quit, your doctor can help.
5. **Ease stress.** Develop healthy self-care strategies like deep breathing, connecting with friends and getting plenty of sleep.
6. **Take your medicines.** Even if you feel fine, don't skip or stop them. They're helping keep you well.

Sources: American Diabetes Association (Diabetes.org); American Heart Association (Heart.org)



Need to limit sodium? Here's how

Is your blood pressure creeping up? To lower it — and protect your heart — your doctor may suggest cutting back on sodium. That's a mineral found in salt.

Most of the sodium in our diets comes from packaged and restaurant foods. These simple steps can help you scale back:

Shop smart.

Always take a few moments to compare food labels. Then choose the product with the least amount of sodium per serving.

Be choosy with condiments.

Sauces, dips and dressings are often packed with sodium. Look for reduced-sodium versions — or use herbs and spices for flavor instead.

Rinse away sodium. Run water over canned veggies and beans before cooking.

Go for fresh. Pick fresh poultry, fish or lean meat instead of cured or smoked foods.



Speak up when dining out.

Ask if your food can be made without extra salt.

Watch for red flags on menus.

Foods described as *pickled*, *brined* or *barbecued* tend to be high in sodium.

A final tip

Food isn't the only source of sodium. Some over-the-counter meds are high in it too. Check their labels — and leave anything with *sodium* or *soda* on the shelf.

Source: American Heart Association (Heart.org)

Know the risks of opioids

Opioids are strong pain medicines. They're easy to get addicted to.

If you need help with pain, talk to your doctor about safer options. If you use an opioid, take the smallest dose you can for the shortest time, and ask about Narcan. It could save your life.

Want to be drug-free? Call the National Helpline at **1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)**.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov); Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA.gov)

Need help? Your care manager can tell you more about your condition. They can connect you with a provider too. Call Member Services and ask for the Care Management Department.

Contact us



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Member Services: **1-800-279-1878**
(TTY: 711 or 1-800-828-1120)
Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
AetnaBetterHealth.com/Virginia

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