

Cardiac Rehabilitation: Lifestyle Changes and Risk Factor Reduction

If you have been diagnosed with heart disease or have had a heart event, it is important for you to take steps now to prevent further damage to your heart, or even another, more serious heart event.

A cardiac rehabilitation program can help you reduce your risk factors for heart disease, the best way is to make healthy lifestyle changes.

The health of your heart today is a result of many factors, some you can't change, like your family history and age, and some you can change.

Risk factors you can change include high blood pressure, unhealthy fat levels in your blood; like cholesterol, being overweight, being physically inactive, choosing unhealthy foods, smoking and other tobacco use, uncontrolled diabetes and stress. Your cardiac rehab team will help you identify the risk factors and lifestyle choices that may have led to your heart disease and help you find ways to make changes to improve your heart health.

The good news, with healthy lifestyle changes you can reduce each one of these risk factors. The bad news, it will take time. You have spent a lifetime developing these habits.

Slow and steady changes work best. Making small, gradual changes to your everyday habits can lead to lifelong changes that will have a positive effect on your heart health. Take it one step at a time.

Meet with your cardiac care team to review your list of risk factors today. Once you identify your risk factors, talk to them about what types of changes you can make. You may be surprised that certain lifestyle changes can actually improve more than one risk factor.

For example, you may decide to become more physically active. This not only directly affects the 'being inactive' risk factor, but physical activity will also have a positive effect on your blood pressure, cholesterol, weight, blood sugar, and stress.

Choosing to make healthy food choices will directly affect the 'choosing unhealthy food choices' risk factor, but it can also change your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, and weight for the better.

Just as all your risk factors worked together over time to lead to heart disease, now all your healthy lifestyle changes can work together to improve your heart health. But remember, it takes time to see positive results from your efforts. And while this may be frustrating at times, the benefits are worth it.

Besides reducing your risk of a serious heart event, healthy lifestyle changes can give you more energy, reduce your chances of other serious diseases, increase your ability to move, improve your memory, increase your

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independence, reduce your stress level, and help you look and feel good.

Healthy changes are worth the time they take. Your heart event or diagnosis is a wake-up call. You need to make changes to your daily habits in order to prevent further damage to your heart; and you can.

With the help of your cardiac rehab team, identify your risk factors for heart disease and the lifestyle changes you can make to improve your heart health. Take it one step at a time and you'll get there.

"You know, as a result of what took place, I changed my lifestyle. And to date, I've lost some 21 pounds. And I've done that very slowly and very methodically through exercise and changing my diet. And it's important that that took place, because I don't intend to go back to where I was." – Gordon, Patient