

Caring for Yourself or a Family Member

After Your Heart Event



MaineHealth
WWW.MAINEHEALTH.ORG

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How to Use This Guide

After leaving the hospital, there are things you can do to feel better and prevent other heart events. In this guide, we will explain what cardiovascular disease is and what happens in your body, and we'll give you information on how to stay healthy.

To get the most out of this guide:

- 1. **Read the guide carefully**
and write down any notes or questions that you have.
- 2. **Take your questions**
with you when you see your doctor or nurse.
- 3. **Keep the guide handy**
and refer to it often.
- 4. **Share the information**
with family and friends.

You will find the meaning of medical terms in the Glossary on page 20.



What Is Cardiovascular Disease?

Cardiovascular disease is often called heart disease. But, it affects more than just your heart. Cardiovascular disease includes problems with your blood vessels, too. It is a lifelong condition.

Cardiovascular disease includes any of these:

- High Blood Pressure
- Coronary Artery Disease
- Stroke
- Heart Failure
- Peripheral Vascular Disease

Having cardiovascular disease makes it more likely that you will have:

- A heart attack
- A stroke
- Pain in your legs due to narrowing of your arteries



What Happens in Your Body

The heart is a pump that pushes blood through vessels called arteries to all parts of the body. The blood returns to the heart through vessels called veins.

Coronary arteries are the arteries that deliver blood to the heart. Arteries can become damaged, and plaque can form in the vessel wall. This often happens because of choices we make, like eating poorly or smoking. High blood pressure and diabetes can damage the heart and arteries.

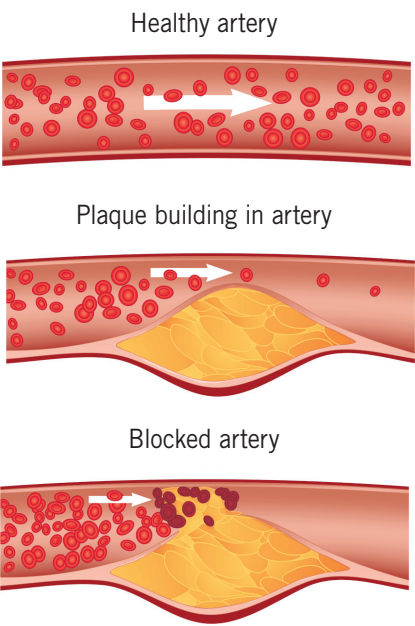
A Heart Attack happens when blood flow is blocked to a part of your heart.

A Stroke happens when blood flow is blocked to a part of your brain.

Peripheral Vascular Disease happens when the blood in your legs does not circulate well.

Heart Failure is when your heart does not pump blood to the body as well as it should because of damage to the heart muscle.

An Aneurysm is a bulge or weakness in the wall of an artery. This can get worse over time, making the wall break and cause life-threatening bleeding.



What You Can Do About Heart Disease

The good news is that you can manage cardiovascular disease! Changing your daily habits can lower your chance of having heart problems in the future.

Things You Can't Change

- Gender – Men are more likely to have heart disease earlier than women. But after menopause, women are just as likely to get heart disease.
- Family history – If other people in your family have had a heart attack or cardiovascular disease, you are more likely to have heart disease.
- Age – You are more likely to have heart disease as you get older.

Things You Can Change

Even though you can't change your gender, family history or age, you can take steps to lower your risk by:

- Lowering high blood pressure
- Lowering high cholesterol
- Managing your diabetes
- Losing weight
- Exercising
- Not using tobacco and not being around smokers
- Lowering your stress

It's important to make changes in these areas. This may seem like a lot of work at first. Start with one thing at a time. Small changes can make a big impact.



People with diabetes have at least twice the risk of cardiovascular disease as people without diabetes. If you have diabetes, it is important to keep your blood sugar under control.



Take Your Medicines

Most people who have a heart attack, stroke or another type of cardiovascular event need to take medicine. For some people, this may be the first time they have ever had to take medicine regularly. Other people may have to take more medicines than they did before.

Here are different types of medicines that you might take:

ACE inhibitors

(lisinopril, enalapril) These lower your blood pressure, help your heart recover after a heart attack and protect your heart and kidneys if you have diabetes.

Antiplatelets

(aspirin, clopidogrel) These keep clots from forming in your arteries and lower the chance of heart attack or stroke. You may need to take more than one kind of antiplatelet.

Beta-blockers

(atenolol, metoprolol) These lower your blood pressure and heart rate so your heart doesn't have to work as hard.

Nitroglycerin

This helps to relieve symptoms of angina by opening up the arteries that supply the heart.

Statins

These lower your bad cholesterol (LDL) and raise your good cholesterol (HDL). Statins have been shown to lower the chance of future heart events for people with heart disease.

It is important that you and your family understand each of the medicines that you take. Talk with your doctor about any questions you have. Keep an up-to-date list of your medicines with you at all times.



Getting Help to Pay for Medicines

There are programs that may be able to help you pay for your medicines. Talk to your pharmacist, doctor or nurse about MedAccess, a program that helps people in Maine get their prescribed medicines.

Call MedAccess at 1-877-275-1787 and ask if you qualify.

Lower Your Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is often called the silent killer because you don't feel any symptoms if you have it. Get your blood pressure checked! Ask your doctor if you should be taking your blood pressure at home. If you should be, ask your doctor or nurse to show you how to do it.

Systolic blood pressure

This is the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats.

Diastolic blood pressure

This is the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats, or when the heart is relaxed.



The goal for most people is for your blood pressure to be below 140 and below 90.

Lower Your Cholesterol

Cholesterol is naturally made by your body and also comes from food. Too much cholesterol and fat in the blood can build up in the walls of the arteries that supply blood to the heart. This buildup, called plaque, makes the arteries narrower. As a result, less blood gets through and blood clots can form.

There are different kinds of cholesterol and fat in your blood:

- HDL, the “good” cholesterol, helps take cholesterol out of your blood.
- LDL, the “bad” cholesterol, carries most of the cholesterol in the blood.
- Triglycerides are a kind of fat carried in the blood.

You can protect your heart and arteries by lowering your LDL and triglycerides. Raising your HDL is important, too.

Healthy eating, weight loss and physical activity can help lower your blood pressure and cholesterol.

Healthy Eating

A healthy diet with lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and nuts, and that is low in saturated fat has been shown to help with weight loss, blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure control.

Eat more of these foods:

- Fish and chicken (without the skin)
- Skim or 1 percent milk and other low-fat dairy products
- Egg whites
- Fruits and vegetables
- Beans and legumes
- Healthy oils: olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil
- Omega-3 foods: salmon, tuna, trout, sardines, flax seeds
- Brown rice, sweet potatoes, whole grain breads and pasta

Eat less of these foods:

- Whole milk and other high-fat dairy products (like ice cream and butter)
- Eggs; people without diabetes, up to 7 a week, people with diabetes, 3 a week
- Red meat, sausage, bacon, cold cuts
- Organ meats like liver, kidney and sweetbreads
- High-fat snacks (chips, candy, crackers)
- Fried food and fast food
- Alcohol
- White flour, white pasta, white potatoes, white rice
- Foods high in salt or sodium

Avoid eating these foods:

- Commercially baked goods: cookies, cakes, donuts, biscuits
- Stick margarine — use soft tub margarine instead
- Packaged foods with high salt and hydrogenated oils



Alcohol Use

Drinking too much alcohol increases your risk for heart disease and stroke.

Too much means more than moderate drinking.

Moderate drinking is:

- Women — no more than one drink each day
- Men — no more than two drinks each day

Count one drink as:

1½ ounces of
80 proof hard liquor



5 ounces
of wine



12 ounces
of beer



Be Physically Active

Being active for **30 minutes** or more on **most days** of the week helps to lower your chance of having another heart event.

Regular exercise can help you:

- Relax
- Feel better about yourself
- Get to a healthy weight
- Raise “good” HDL cholesterol
- Strengthen your muscles
- Maintain balance and flexibility
- Control your diabetes

Here are some things you might try:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Biking
- Gardening
- Climbing stairs
- Raking leaves
- Dancing

Talk to your doctor before starting to exercise. Find out what is best for you, and decide what fits your lifestyle. Cardiac rehab is a safe, monitored way to start exercising after a heart event.

Healthy Weight

The more overweight you are, the higher your chance of getting many diseases including heart disease, peripheral vascular disease (PVD) and stroke.

Losing weight can help you to:

- Have more energy
- Lower your cholesterol
- Lower your blood pressure
- Put less strain on your joints, particularly your knees and hips
- Prevent Type 2 diabetes
- Improve blood sugar levels

It is important to balance the calories you eat and the calories you burn so that you can maintain a healthy weight. If you need to lose weight, you will need to eat fewer calories than you burn. Your body burns calories by being physically active.



For You:
A list of Cardiac
Rehab Programs
is included on
page 18.



Sexual Activity

Many people who have had a heart attack, stroke or other serious condition wonder if they can still have sex. Yes. Sexual activity is not dangerous to your heart. Just as with any other activity, you should not have sex if you are feeling ill, are very short of breath or are having chest pains.

If sex is difficult for you, try to find other ways of being physically close and intimate. For example:

- Find other ways to show affection like hugging or cuddling.
- Try other things like caressing, fondling or kissing.
- Show affection by talking with your spouse or partner.



* remember

Sexual activity is not dangerous to your heart.

Certain medicines may cause problems with sex including:

- Lower sex drive
- Problems with ejaculation
- Impotence
- Inability to have an orgasm or climax.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you are having these issues. They may be able to help.



tips

1. Talk openly with your partner about your sexual needs and concerns.
2. Pick a time for sex when you feel rested and comfortable.
3. Avoid sex after eating a big meal or drinking alcohol.
4. Have sex in a room that is not too hot or too cold.
5. Use foreplay to help your heart get used to the increased activity level.
6. Try different positions. Avoid positions in which you are supporting most of your weight with your arms.
7. Have sex in less tiring positions such as lying on the bottom or with you and your partner lying side by side.

Avoid Tobacco and Secondhand Smoke

Quitting tobacco is the #1 thing you can do to improve your health.

- If you smoke, you are up to 6 times more likely to have a heart attack than nontobacco users.
 - Tobacco use puts stress on your heart. The chemicals in cigarettes narrow your coronary arteries, raise blood pressure and make the heart work harder.
 - Tobacco use shortens your life.
 - Tobacco use raises your risk of stroke and peripheral vascular disease.
- Quitting can save your life. Even if you already have heart disease, you can gain years of life by quitting. It is never too late to quit.

Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is the smoke that is breathed out by a smoker from a burning cigarette, cigar or pipe.

Secondhand smoke hurts anyone who breathes it.

- The risk of getting heart disease and lung cancer goes up.
- For nonsmokers, the risk of heart attack goes up. People who already have heart disease are at especially high risk.



How to Avoid Secondhand Smoke:

Start with these steps:

- Don't allow smoking in your home. If you live with a smoker, ask him or her to smoke outside. Ask guests, too.
- Ask people not to smoke in your car.
- Make sure that smoking rules are followed at your job.
- Choose smoke-free child and elder care facilities. Tell your child's or aging loved one's caregivers not to smoke around them.
- Avoid places where smoking is allowed.

If you have a partner or other loved one who smokes, offer support and encouragement to stop smoking. The entire family will benefit if they quit.

For help quitting tobacco, contact The Maine Tobacco Helpline at:
1-800-207-1230

Your Body After Quitting



- After 20 minutes:**
Blood pressure and pulse rate drop. Body temperature of hands and feet increases.
- After 48 hours:**
Ability to smell and taste improves.
- After 2 weeks:**
Circulation improves.
- After 1 year:**
Risk of coronary artery disease is half that of a smoker.
- After 5–15 years:**
Risk of stroke is the same as for someone who does not smoke.
- After 15 years:**
Risk of coronary artery disease is the same as for someone who does not smoke.

Your Mental Health

It’s normal to feel stress sometimes. But too much stress can raise your chance of having a heart attack.

What Happens When You Are Stressed?

- Your heart rate speeds up
- Your blood pressure goes up
- Your muscles tense
- Your breathing speeds up
- You start sweating
- Blood flow to your organs and limbs goes down

Ask for help to learn how to deal with your stress so you feel better and stay healthier.

Depression and Anxiety

Having cardiovascular disease may bring out many feelings. You might feel sad, scared or even angry. It is normal to feel this way.

At first, you may find it hard to accept that you have heart disease. Accepting your disease will allow you to start caring for yourself better.

Many people with heart disease have depression or anxiety or both. There is help for these problems. People who get help often live fuller and more meaningful lives.

If depression and anxiety are getting in the way of living your life, talk with your doctor or nurse about seeing a mental health professional.

Symptoms of depression may include:

- Little interest or pleasure in doing things
- Lack of attention to personal needs (cleanliness, clothing, food or medical needs)
- Feelings of worthlessness that don’t go away
- Use of alcohol or drugs to cope
- Moodiness or anger
- Too much or too little sleep
- Feelings of being tired or having little energy
- Poor appetite or overeating
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Symptoms of anxiety may include:

- Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge
- Not being able to stop or control worrying
- Having trouble relaxing
- Becoming annoyed or irritable
- Feeling afraid that something awful might happen

Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea is a serious disorder. It is when a person stops breathing or breathes shallowly during sleep.

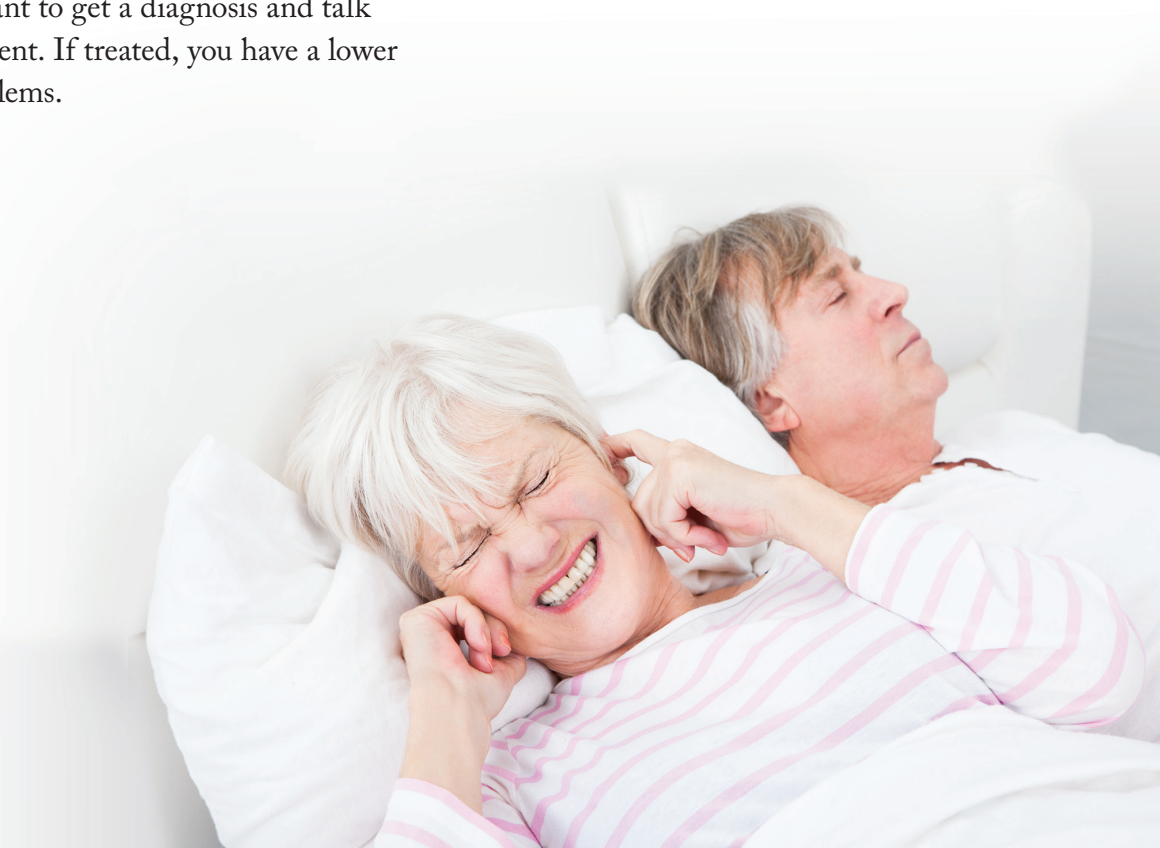
People with untreated sleep apnea are more likely to have:

- High blood pressure
- Blood sugar problems such as diabetes
- Heart failure
- A heart attack
- A stroke

Symptoms of sleep apnea are:

- Loud snoring
- Gasping or choking during sleep
- Extreme daytime sleepiness

If you think that you might have sleep apnea, talk with your healthcare team. It is important to get a diagnosis and talk about your choices for treatment. If treated, you have a lower chance for further heart problems.



Warning Signs of Heart Attack

These are the typical warning signs for heart attack for men and women. Some people may have all of these signs, while some may have few or none.

- 
1.

Chest discomfort. It may last more than a few minutes or go away and come back. It can feel like pressure, squeezing or pain.

2.

Discomfort in other parts of the body. It may be in one or both arms or your back, neck or jaw.

3.

Shortness of breath. This may be the **only** symptom of a heart attack.

4.

Other signs. These may include having a cold sweat, feeling sick to your stomach or being light-headed.

Make sure family members and others close to you know the warning signs. The sooner someone gets help, the better.

IMPORTANT!

If you think you or someone else might be having a heart attack, **call 9-1-1** immediately. Even if you are not sure, call for help.

Women and Heart Attack

Heart disease is the #1 killer of both women and men. Nearly half of all heart attack deaths are women.

Heart attacks can be different for men and women.

Women are:

- Less likely to believe they're having a heart attack.
- Slower to seek emergency treatment.
- Usually about 10 years older than men when they have a heart attack.

Be aware of these signs of a heart attack.

- Women are more likely than men to have:
- Shortness of breath
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Pain in the back, neck or jaw

Women also have these less common signs:

- Heartburn
- Loss of appetite
- Feelings of being tired or weak
- Coughing
- Heart flutters



MaineHealth Cardiac Rehabilitation Programs

Rehabilitation programs are often recommended after a cardiovascular event like a heart attack. These programs can help you get on track with a heart healthy lifestyle

through exercise, education and emotional support. Ask your healthcare team about what program would be best for you. Check with your insurance company to see what is covered.

Franklin Memorial Hospital
Cardiac Rehabilitation
111 Franklin Health Commons
Farmington, ME 04938
Telephone: 207-779-2734

**MaineGeneral Medical Center
Augusta Campus**
A Change of Heart Works
35 Medical Center Parkway
Augusta, ME 04330
Telephone: 207-626-1529

**MaineGeneral Medical Center
Waterville Campus**
A Change of Heart Works
Thayer Unit
149 North Street
Waterville, ME 04901
Telephone: 207-872-1353

Maine Medical Center
Turning Point Heart
Health Program
96 Campus Drive
Scarborough, ME 04074
Telephone: 207-396-8700 or
1-866-556-2550 (toll-free)

Memorial Hospital
Heart and Wellness Services
3073 White Mountain Highway
North Conway, NH 03860
Telephone: 603-356-0616

Mid Coast Hospital
Running Start Cardiac
Rehab Program
123 Medical Center Drive
Suite 3200
Medical Office Building
Brunswick, ME 04011
Telephone: 207-373-6360

Penobscot Bay Medical Center
6 Glen Cove Drive
Rockport, ME 04856
Telephone: 207-921-8989

**Southern Maine Health Care
Biddeford**
Cardiac Rehabilitation
P.O. Box 626
Biddeford, ME 04005-0626
Telephone: 207-283-7908

**Southern Maine Health Care
Sanford**
Cardiopulmonary Wellness
Center
25 June Street
Sanford, ME 04073
Telephone: 207-490-7539

**St. Mary's Regional Medical
Center
Auburn Campus**
Cardiopulmonary
Rehab Program
15 Gracelawn Road
Auburn, ME 04210
Telephone: 207-753-3259

Stephens Memorial Hospital
Vital Connections
181 Main Street
Norway, ME 04268
Telephone: 207-744-6030

Waldo County General Hospital
Heartworks Cardiac
Rehabilitation
118 Northport Avenue
P.O. Box 287
Belfast, ME 04915
Telephone: 207-930-2545

Learn More

American Heart Association
51 US Route 1, Suite M
Scarborough, ME 04074
1-800-937-0944 (toll-free)
www.heart.org/maine
Provides free pamphlets on stroke and heart disease.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/heartdisease
Provides information on prevention, risk facts for heart disease, educational information and resources about heart disease.

DASH Diet
www.dashdiet.org
Provides information about the DASH Diet eating plan including sample menus.

Healthy Maine Walks
www.healthymainewalks.org
Provides information about walking trails and paths throughout Maine.

MaineHealth Learning Resource Centers
Falmouth and Scarborough
1-866-609-5183 (toll-free)
www.MaineHealthLearningCenter.org
Provides health information and education to patients and families. Each center has a library of books and videos on healthcare topics and health educators to help you.

Mended Hearts
www.mendedhearts.org
Provides education and resources for people with heart disease, including contact information for local chapters of support groups.

Maine Tobacco HelpLine
1-800-207-1230 (toll-free)
www.tobaccofreemaine.org
Provides free, private information about quitting tobacco to any Maine caller, including friends and loved ones of tobacco users.

MedAccess
1-877-275-1787
www.mainehealth.org/carepartners
Provides information to Maine people about low-cost medicines and local, state and federal programs to call for help with paying for prescribed medicines.

MyPlate
www.choosemyplate.gov
Provides information about food groups, portion sizes, menu planning and calories in certain foods.

Glossary

Aneurysm (AN-yuh-riz-uhm): A bulge or weakness in the wall of an artery or vein.

Angina (AN-juh-nuh or an-JIY-nuh): A chest pain or discomfort that happens when the heart does not get enough blood. It might feel like squeezing in the chest, indigestion or pain in the arms, shoulders, jaw, neck or back.

Arteries (AHR-teer-ees): Blood vessels that carry blood to the cells, tissues and organs of the body.

Cardiovascular disease (kahr-dee-oh-VAS-kyuh-ler dih-ZEEZ): Any disease that affects the heart or blood vessels.

Cholesterol (kuh-LES-tuh-rawl): A waxy fat-like substance that is naturally in the body.

Coronary artery disease (KOR-uh-ner-ee AHR-tuh-ree dih-ZEEZ): A condition in which plaque builds up inside the heart arteries, causing your heart to receive less blood.

Diabetes (dye-a-BEET-eeze): A disease in which there is a high glucose (sugar) level in the blood.

Diastolic blood pressure (die-uh-STALL-ik blood PRESH-er): The pressure in the arteries between heartbeats, or when the heart is relaxed.

Heart attack: Event in which blood vessels that bring blood to the heart are blocked and there is not enough oxygen getting to the heart. The heart muscle can be permanently damaged if blood supply is not restored.

Heart failure: Event in which your heart does not pump blood to the body as well as it should because of damage to the heart muscle.

High blood pressure or hypertension (hahy-per-TEN-shuhn): When the force of blood against the artery walls is high enough that it can cause health problems.

Hydrogenated oils (hiy-DROJ-uh-neyt-ed oils): Oils that are put through a process that gives them a solid or semisolid texture. Hydrogen is forced into vegetable oil to change the shape of the molecule. This creates trans fats, which raise LDL (bad) cholesterol.

Impotence (IM-puh-tuhns): When a man can't have an erection for long enough to have sexual intercourse.

Peripheral vascular disease (puh-RIF-er-uhl VAS-kyuh-ler dih-ZEEZ): A condition in which the arteries that bring blood to the limbs (usually the legs) get clogged or partially blocked, often causing pain.

Plaque (PLAK): Extra cholesterol and fat that build up on the lining of an artery wall. It can make the arteries narrower and sticky, meaning less blood can get through and clots can form.

Stroke (STROHK): A sudden loss of brain function that happens when blood flow to the brain is interrupted or when blood vessels in the brain rupture.

Systolic blood pressure (sih-STALL-ik blood PRESH-er): The pressure in the arteries when the heart beats.

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Information in this booklet was adapted from *Cardiovascular Disease: Information for Patients and Families – A Guide to Understanding Heart Disease, Peripheral Vascular Disease and Stroke*. To learn more about cardiovascular disease or for references used in this document, please contact the MaineHealth Learning Resource Center toll-free at 1-866-609-5183 or www.mainehealth.org/lrc and ask to speak with a health educator.

MaineHealth would like to acknowledge the dedicated work of the Cardiovascular Health Workgroup in developing this resource booklet for patients and families.

Connecting the Dots for a Heart Healthy Life

1. Take your medicines as prescribed by your doctor
2. Strive for a healthy weight
3. Exercise at least 30 minutes, most days of the week
4. Eat a healthy diet
5. Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke
6. Manage your stress
7. Talk with your doctor if you are having problems with anxiety or depression

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