

Modifiable Risk Factors

getthehearthealthy.ca/modifiable-risk-factors

In this section you will learn:

- What the risk factors for cardiovascular disease are
- The difference between modifiable and non-modifiable risk factors
- Strategies for management of modifiable risk factors

Modifiable vs. Non-Modifiable Risk Factors

- A risk factor is something that increases your chance of developing a disease; the more you have, the greater your chance of developing the disease.
- Non-modifiable risk factors are things that you do not have control over. These include age, ethnicity, and family history.
- Modifiable risk factors are things that you have control over. These include:



Physical activity levels



Dietary choices



Blood sugar levels



Cholesterol levels



Blood pressure



Smoke intake and exposure



Alcohol consumption



Stress levels



Sleep habits

Circle the risk factors that apply to you

Strategies to Manage Modifiable Risk Factors

Engage in regular physical activity and exercise: Regular, moderate to vigorous exercise can lower your risk of cardiovascular disease. Each week, aim to complete 150 to 300 minutes of cardio-based exercise, and at least two days of resistance training.

Follow a heart healthy diet: Aim to include plant-based foods as often as possible. Plant-based foods are rich in fibre, minerals, vitamins and antioxidants. Examples include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds and legumes. Fatty fish and olive oil are also healthy choices.

Manage blood sugar levels: Blood sugar values can be impacted by many of the risk factors listed here; managing these will help to contribute to blood sugar control. Ensure you are aware of your target values, and that you are taking your medications as prescribed.

Manage blood cholesterol levels: There are several ways to manage your cholesterol levels including regular exercise, eating whole, minimally processed foods more often, and taking your medications as prescribed.

Do you know what your blood cholesterol levels are?

Manage blood pressure levels: For most people living with cardiovascular disease, the recommended resting blood pressure value is less than 140/90 mmHg. Blood pressure values can be impacted by many of the risk factors listed here; managing these will help to contribute to blood pressure control.

Reduce smoke intake and exposure: Smoking, or exposure to smoke, can harm almost every organ in the body. When planning to reduce exposure to smoke, it is important to develop a plan and get support.

Speak with your Exercise Therapist for smoking cessation services and resources.

Follow recommended alcohol guidelines: If you drink alcohol, ensure you stay within alcohol consumption guidelines. The risk of negative outcomes increases with increased consumption. If consuming more than two standard drinks per week, most individuals will have an increased risk of injury or health concerns.

Stress management: Stress management solutions are unique to each individual; finding what works best for you is important. Suggestions include engaging in physical activity and exercise, improving sleep hygiene, or completing meditation or relaxation exercises.

Establish good sleep habits: It is recommended that adults achieve seven to nine hours of quality sleep per night. Practice good sleep hygiene by keeping a regular sleep schedule, limiting screen time prior to bedtime, and avoiding alcohol or heavy meals prior to bedtime.

Ask Yourself

Select one of the modifiable risk factors that you circled above.
What is one thing that you can do this week to help manage this risk factor?