Heart Disease: How to Manage Your Life After a Heart Attack

After a heart attack, you probably have concerns about your health. But you can start doing things now to improve your health and prevent another heart attack.

Medicines and healthy lifestyle changes can help you prevent another heart attack. A healthy lifestyle means being active, eating a heart-healthy diet, and controlling your blood pressure and cholesterol.

Your doctor may recommend a cardiac rehabilitation program. This will help you recover and improve your health. You will learn how to exercise safely, change your diet, deal with stress, and return to your daily activities.

Medicines
Certain medicines can lower your risk of having another heart attack. These include:

- Beta-blockers and ACE inhibitors to lower your blood pressure and reduce the workload on your heart.
- Aspirin and other antiplatelet medicines to help prevent blood clots.
- Statins to lower your cholesterol.

Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. And don't stop taking them unless your doctor tells you to. If you stop taking your medicines, you can increase your risk of having another heart attack.

Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.

Manage other health problems
You can help lower your chance of having another heart attack by managing other health problems you might have. Health problems such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes can increase your risk of a heart attack.

If you have any of these health problems, healthy lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, eating better, and being active, can help. You also may need to take medicines to manage these conditions.

Lifestyle changes
Healthy lifestyle changes can help prevent another heart attack:

- Quit smoking, and avoid secondhand smoke. This is one of the best things you can do for your heart and your overall health.
- Be active. Get at least 30 minutes of activity on most days of the week. Physical activity, like walking, can help you lose weight, lower your blood pressure, and improve your cholesterol. Before starting activity, talk to your doctor to find out how much is safe for you. Increase your activity a little bit at a time, as your doctor approves.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet. This includes plenty of fruits and vegetables, fish, and high-fiber grains and breads. Eat foods low in sodium (salt), saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol.
• Lose weight if you need to, and stay at a healthy weight.
• Cut down on stress. Stress may damage your heart, and it can trigger a heart attack.
• Avoid colds and flu. Get the flu vaccine every year. Get a pneumococcal vaccine shot. If you have had one before, ask your doctor whether you need another dose.
• Ask for help if you think you are depressed.

Take part in cardiac rehab
A medical team can design a cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) program to fit your needs. This type of program helps you recover from a heart attack. It also helps you take steps to prevent another one.

In the program, your doctor and other specialists will give you education and support to help you build new, healthy habits. You will learn how to manage your heart disease and any other health problems you might have.

Working with your team, you'll decide what lifestyle choices are best for you.

If your doctor hasn't already suggested it, ask him or her if cardiac rehab is right for you.

When to call for help
Call 911 if:
• You have symptoms of a heart attack.
• You have signs of a stroke, such as:
  ◦ Sudden numbness, paralysis, or weakness in your face, arm, or leg, especially on only one side of your body.
  ◦ New problems with walking or balance.
  ◦ Sudden vision changes.
  ◦ Drooling or slurred speech.
  ◦ New problems speaking or understanding simple statements, or feeling confused.
  ◦ A sudden, severe headache that is different from past headaches.