

## INTRODUCTION TO LIFESTYLE CHANGES

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The heart is a very strong muscle. Your heart attack may have damaged part of it, but it is still doing its job.

Now your job is to do all you can to reduce the chances you will have another heart attack. And the best way to do that is with lifestyle changes.

Making lifestyle changes means you are working to change certain unhealthy habits, the things you do on a regular basis everyday probably without even thinking, into healthy habits.

But making lifestyle changes can be difficult. You are trying to change habits you have lived with for years.

*"It's difficult to make changes at first, but I think just the change in attitude is really the best way to go."*

*"I never had the fear that I would walk outside and something would happen again, I mean, not at all. That didn't bother me. For whatever reason, it was the power of positive thinking and this whole idea that I can take care of myself ... and if I did things that I was supposed to do, I probably wouldn't have this problem again."*

*"I have 50% narrowing of the veins, I mean of the arteries, so those can never get better, but I can prevent them from getting worse. And so that meant a life change for me in lots of ways."*

When you first decide you want to make lifestyle changes, you may feel overwhelmed. If you feel like you have too many things that need change, keep it simple.

Start by looking closely at your risk factors. Forget about the ones you have no control over, like your age or family history. Concentrate on changing the risk factors you can control. These include: using tobacco or smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, physical inactivity, obesity, diabetes and stress.

*"I know you are being medicated at this time for high blood pressure and also high cholesterol, which we consider to be risk factors if you are being medicated. And you also listed stress as another risk factor."*

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Once you decide on the risk factor you want to work on, look at the things you do every day that increase that risk factor. Decide how you can change these habits slowly, and turn them from unhealthy to heart healthy.

Maybe a change in what you eat will help. Perhaps you need to quit smoking. Or maybe you can take medications on a regular basis to reduce the risk factor.

Whatever lifestyle change you decide to make, don't overwhelm yourself by trying to work on too many risk factors at once. You will just set yourself up for failure. Instead, take one step at a time. Talk to your cardiac care team and choose one risk factor you want to reduce today.

Remember, the small steps you take to change your life now can have a big effect on your overall heart health for a lifetime.

*"I really did change ... I changed everything. I felt I owed it to my family, to Vivian and the kids."*