



Spring 2026

How can I get in shape?

Maybe you exercised regularly at one time but stopped because of a schedule change, added stress or a simple loss of motivation. Or maybe you are starting a consistent routine for the first time. Either way, it helps to know what to expect.

With steady effort, most people begin to build muscle strength and cardiovascular endurance within four to six weeks. Visible changes often follow by about 12 weeks.

Consistency matters. Aim for about four workouts a week, spacing them out to allow recovery. Rest days should still include light movement — sometimes called active recovery — such as yoga, swimming, cycling or foam rolling. These lower-intensity sessions keep your body moving without pushing for additional gains.

Start at a pace that fits

If you are new to structured exercise, consider working with a certified personal trainer or strength and conditioning coach. Professional guidance can help you develop proper form, reduce injury risk and tailor a program to your goals and fitness level.

Choose a pace that feels challenging while allowing you to complete each movement with good technique. If weights feel so heavy that you cannot finish repetitions with control, scale back. After one to two weeks, once the routine feels manageable, gradually increase intensity.

Running requires a slightly different approach. A walk-run method — alternating one minute of walking with 30 seconds of running — allows your body to adapt safely. Over time, extend the running intervals to build endurance.

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Get in shape

Starting slowly can prevent injury and burnout. Doing too much too soon often leads to soreness, frustration or quitting altogether.

Breaking through plateaus

After several weeks of consistent training, progress may stall. This is common and often signals that your body has adapted to your routine.

To move forward, vary your workouts. If you routinely perform squats or bench presses, try different exercises that target the same muscle groups in new ways. Runners can increase distance, adjust pace or incorporate interval training.

Depending on your goals, continued gains may not always be necessary. Maintenance is a worthwhile objective. Preserving strength, mobility and endurance can support long-term health and function.

How quickly do you lose fitness?

Fitness declines more quickly than it builds. Muscle strength and cardiovascular endurance can begin to decrease after about two weeks of inactivity. That does not mean a single missed workout will undo progress. However, extended periods of complete inactivity can lead to noticeable losses.

If travel or life events disrupt your routine, stay as active as possible. Even one or two lighter sessions can help maintain conditioning and ease the transition back to your usual schedule.

Most important, allow for flexibility. Not every workout will feel strong or productive. Progress is gradual, and setbacks are normal. Building and maintaining fitness is a long-term commitment that rewards steady effort over time.

Learn more at henryford.com/blog/categories/movewell and talk with your primary care doctor before beginning a new exercise routine.



Smoking, Vaping and Nicotine: Effects on your brain and body

When people think about smoking risks, they often think about lung disease. But tobacco and nicotine use through any mechanism affect nearly every organ, including the brain and heart.

Risks of smoking

Smoking damages blood vessels, raises heart rate and blood pressure, and promotes plaque buildup in arteries. Over time, reduced circulation limits oxygen to the brain and other organs.

Chronic exposure to tobacco smoke also drives inflammation and oxidative stress, which contribute to long-term cognitive decline.

These changes increase the risk of:

- **Stroke**, caused by blocked or ruptured blood vessels in the brain
- **Dementia**, including Alzheimer's disease
- **Peripheral artery disease and heart disease**

Risks of vaping

E-cigarettes are often marketed as safer than cigarettes, but they still expose users to nicotine and other harmful substances.

Aerosols found in vape products may contain heavy metals, ultrafine particles and chemicals that irritate lung tissue and blood vessels. These exposures can impair circulation and may increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Many vaping products deliver high levels of nicotine, which can quickly lead to dependence and affect attention, memory and mood.

Risks of nicotine

Nicotine itself is highly addictive and changes brain chemistry by triggering dopamine release in the brain's reward system. Repeated

exposure makes it harder to function without nicotine and can worsen anxiety and depression symptoms.

Nicotine also:

- Raises blood pressure and heart rate
- Constricts blood vessels
- Increases cardiovascular risk
- Interferes with brain development in teens and young adults

Products such as nicotine pouches may seem safer because they do not produce smoke, but they still deliver concentrated nicotine and can sustain addiction.

The benefits of quitting

Quitting nicotine allows the body to begin healing. Heart rate and blood pressure can improve within hours, circulation can improve within weeks, and stroke and heart disease risk can decline over time. Long-term cognitive risk also improves.

Most people succeed with a combination of medication and behavioral support, and it often takes more than one attempt.

Ready to quit?

Henry Ford Health's Tobacco Treatment Service provides expert support. Learn more at henryford.com/services/tobacco-treatment and always consult with your provider to develop a safe treatment plan.

Healthy eating that actually works

A healthy diet does not have to feel restrictive or bland. Eating well is about balance, variety and small, sustainable choices that support long-term health.

Nutritious eating supports heart health and helps lower the risk for several chronic conditions, including obesity, Type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. It also supports energy, mood and overall well-being.

Healthy eating does not mean eliminating favorite foods. It means adding more nutrient-dense options, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins, while cutting back on sodium, ultra-processed foods and added sugars. Flexible approaches are easier to maintain and more likely to become lifelong habits.

Smart choices for everyday eating

DO

Keep proteins lean

Choose lean cuts of meat and poultry, trim visible fat and keep portions to about three to four ounces — roughly the size of a deck of cards. Plant-based proteins such as beans, lentils and tofu are also strong options.

Fill half your plate with color

Fruits and vegetables should make up about half of each meal. Mix fresh, frozen or canned options without added sugar or salt. Add vegetables to soups, omelets and pasta dishes, or blend fruit into smoothies.

Add healthy fats

Federal dietary guidelines recommend at least eight ounces of seafood each week. Options such as salmon, tuna, sardines and mackerel

provide heart-healthy omega-3 fats. You can also get healthy fats from lean meats and plant-based proteins. Choose poultry, eggs and small portions of lean beef or pork, and pair them with foods rich in unsaturated fats such as avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, tofu, edamame and hummus. These options support heart health while helping you stay satisfied.

AVOID

Changing too much at once

Gradual changes help prevent burnout. Start with simple swaps, such as whole-grain bread instead of white bread, low-fat dairy instead of full-fat versions, and olive or canola oil instead of butter.

Skipping planning

Meal planning and a weekly grocery list help keep choices consistent and reduce impulse buying. Pair healthy eating with regular physical activity to reinforce progress.

Relying on takeout

Restaurant and fast-food meals often contain more sodium and larger portions than recommended. Cooking at home helps control ingredients, portion sizes and costs. Use herbs, spices and sodium-free seasoning blends to boost flavor without extra salt.

Healthy eating is a long-term investment in your health. Small, consistent steps can improve energy, support weight management and reduce chronic disease risk. Over time, these habits become routine — and that is when meaningful, lasting change happens.

Ready to make a change? Talk with your primary care provider about a referral to a registered dietitian for personalized nutrition guidance. Small steps today can lead to lasting improvements in your health.

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Build a healthy plate

Use this quick guide at lunch or dinner.

- 1. Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables**
Fresh, frozen or canned without added sugar or salt all count. Aim for a mix of colors for a wider range of nutrients.
- 2. Add a lean protein**
Choose chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, beans, lentils or tofu. Keep portions about the size of a deck of cards.
- 3. Include a whole grain**
Brown rice, quinoa, whole-wheat pasta or whole-grain bread provide fiber and lasting energy.
- 4. Add a healthy fat**
Top meals with avocado slices, olive oil, nuts, seeds or hummus. Include seafood such as salmon or tuna twice a week for omega-3 fats.
- 5. Watch sodium and added sugar**
Flavor foods with herbs, spices, citrus or vinegar instead of salt-heavy sauces.

Resources to remember

Concierge Team
Call 866.434.1369

Available Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., to help you find a provider or schedule an appointment.

Henry Ford MyCare Advice Line
Call 833.262.1949

Staffed by nurses and supported by a physician on-call 24/7 for adult and pediatric medical advice, you have access to immediate guidance for unexpected health concerns at no cost.

HenryFord.com/MyChart

The Henry Ford MyChart online tool gives you access to your medical records, test results, a way to communicate with your provider and schedule/conduct virtual visits.

HAP.org/Find-A-Doctor

Check online to see if your provider is in-network (Tier 1) by visiting HAP.org/Find-A-Doctor.

HenryFord.com/YourHealthCarePlan

Learn more about the HFHS Advantage Tiered Access and CDHP Comprehensive HFHS Preferred Network plans.