We all know the dangers of cigarette smoking: an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and at least 13 kinds of cancer. Just knowing the dangers of smoking isn’t always enough to make us quit. We may need some proven stop-smoking tools to overcome this powerful habit.

The National Cancer Institute has some ideas:

1. List why you want to quit. Go beyond health issues to include things like saving money, becoming a better role model and feeling good about yourself.
2. Think about when and why you smoke. When driving? After a meal? When bored? By knowing your triggers, you can better overcome them.
3. Set a quit date within the next two weeks.
4. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Prescription and over-the-counter medicines are available to help ease withdrawal symptoms. Ask your employer or insurance company for any benefits available to assist you.
5. Tell friends and family you’re quitting, and ask for their help.
6. Rid your home, car and work area of tobacco, matches, lighters and ashtrays.
7. When your quit date arrives, stay busy. Exercise. See a movie. Visit places where smoking isn’t allowed.
8. Do new things that don’t involve smoking. Try swimming, bike riding, woodworking or gardening.

If you slip up and smoke, don’t despair. Many people make attempts to stop smoking before they’re able to quit for good.

Quitting cigarettes can be hard, but it’s worth the effort.

Source: National Cancer Institute
When Blood Pressure Rises

You may not feel it, but with each heartbeat, blood is surging through your arteries. Your heart pumps oxygen-rich blood to your organs and other tissues and returns oxygen-poor blood to your heart and lungs for the process to start all over again.

When the pressure of blood on the walls of the arteries is too high—known as hypertension—you are at increased risk for heart attack, stroke and kidney failure. Chronic high blood pressure in arteries can overtax them. If arteries become narrowed or blocked, the organs they supply—such as the kidneys, brain and heart—are starved of oxygen, which results in tissue damage.

You can reduce the risk of strain on your heart and arteries by keeping your blood pressure in a healthy range, which is less than 120/80 mm Hg for most people.

**WHAT THE NUMBERS MEAN**

Systolic pressure is the first (and higher) number in the reading. It measures the force in the arteries when the heart muscle contracts (beats).

Diastolic pressure, the second (and lower) number, measures the force between heartbeats, when the muscle relaxes.

**FIVE FOR LIFE**

Work with your healthcare provider to manage your blood pressure. In addition, try these tips from the American Heart Association:

1. Avoid alcohol and tobacco.
2. Be active on a regular basis.
3. Eat a diet that is high in potassium-rich foods (such as fruits and vegetables) and low in sodium.
4. Maintain a healthy weight.
5. Manage stress.

By sticking with these lifestyle changes and, if needed, the medication that your doctor prescribes, you can help keep your blood pressure at a healthier level.

Sources: American College of Emergency Physicians; American Heart Association; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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**Heart Failure**

**Signs of Trouble**

To manage heart failure well, you need to keep track of your symptoms. Doing so can help your doctor know if your condition is getting worse.

If you have any of the following signs, let your doctor know right away:

- Increased swelling. Heart failure can cause some swelling in your legs, ankles and feet. However, watch for an increase in swelling or swelling in a new area of the body.
- Sudden change in weight. In general, you should weigh yourself daily at the same time of day. Watch for a weight gain of two pounds or more in one day or more than five pounds in one week. Keeping a daily weight record can help you keep track.

Other signs to watch for:

- A general feeling of weakness.
- Shortness of breath with a wet cough.

Sources: American Heart Association; American Academy of Family Physicians