

Your lifestyle can directly affect your health. Lifestyle changes may help you avoid illness or enable you to reduce the dose and/or the number of medicines that you take.

Regular exercise, a healthy weight, not smoking and reducing the amount of alcohol you drink (if its excessive) may improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of lifestyle-related diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

Depending on your circumstances, it is not always easy to make these changes alone, but seeking help from a qualified health professional can often help.

Quit smoking

Many chronic conditions are caused or made worse by smoking, and quitting can have immediate benefits for your body. Nicotine replacement products work for some people. These include nicotine patches, gums, lozenges, tablets and inhalers. Some prescription medicines can help reduce the urge to smoke. Quitting smoking is tough and often requires additional support. Call the Quitline on 137 848 or speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

Eat a balanced diet

Healthy eating is a vital part of good health. A balanced diet means eating a variety of foods to get all the nutrients you need. Eat 5 serves of vegetables and 2 serves of fruit a day.¹ Eat wholegrain foods (e.g. bread, pasta and cereals), legumes (e.g. beans and lentils), lean meats, poultry, fish, and low-fat dairy products. Reduce your intake of salt, sugar and saturated fat. Drink at least 6–8 glasses of water a day.² For more information, speak to your doctor or a dietitian about a balanced diet.

Alcohol in moderation

Adults should consume two or fewer standard drinks on any one day to reduce risk of harm from drinking.³ If you drink alcohol, some alcohol-free days each week may help your body recover from the effects of alcohol.

Alcohol can affect your balance leading to falls and serious injuries. Mixing alcohol and medicines can be harmful or make the medicines less effective.⁴ Check the consumer medicine information (CMI) leaflet for the medicine, or ask your doctor or pharmacist if your medicine interacts with alcohol.

Be active

Keeping physically active can reduce your likelihood of developing serious conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, and helps prevent a range of other conditions. Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day, either all at once or in 10 minute sessions. Moderate activity is equal in intensity to a brisk walk.⁵ Walking and using the stairs are good ways to keep active and maintain muscle strength.

People with chronic conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and arthritis can improve these conditions if they exercise safely.⁵ If you are not currently exercising regularly and are not sure if exercise is safe for you, speak to your doctor.

You can get more information from the Australian Physical Activity Guidelines.⁶

Maintain a healthy weight

One in two Australian adults are overweight.⁷ Carrying extra weight around your waist increases your risk of developing type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Recommended and risky waist measurements for the above mentioned chronic conditions are in the table below.⁸

	Male	Female
Recommended waist measurements	Below 94 cm	Below 80 cm
Increased risk	94-102 cm	80-88 cm
Greatly increased risk	Over 102 cm	Over 88 cm

For more information, talk to your doctor, community nurse or other healthcare professionals.

Know your medicines

As your health improves through a changed lifestyle, ask your doctor if your medicines should change. You may be able to reduce your dose or stop a medicine altogether.

It is important to know the active ingredient of your medicine, what your medicine is for, how much you take and how often, what times of the day to take it, whether or not to take it with food, what to do if you miss a dose, and possible side effects and interactions with food or other medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for the consumer medicine information (CMI) leaflets for your medicines.

Keep an up-to-date Medicines List to help keep track of your medicines. Take your Medicines List with you each time you visit your doctor, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

For more information

Contact the NPS Medicines Line on 1300 633 424, or visit the NPS website at www.nps.org.au.

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