

HEART DISEASE

Heart disease is the **leading cause of death** in the United States, but that doesn't mean you have to accept it as your fate. Although you lack the power to change some risk factors – such as family history, sex, or age – there are some key heart disease prevention steps you can take.



CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE (CAD)

Coronary artery disease develops when the major blood vessels (coronary arteries) to your heart become damaged or diseased generally from cholesterol-containing deposits (plaque). When plaque builds up, your coronary arteries narrow, decreasing blood flow to your heart. This can lead to chest pain (angina) and shortness of breath. A complete blockage can cause a heart attack.

HEART ATTACK

A heart attack, also called myocardial infarction occurs when blood flow to the heart is blocked, most often from plaque deposits. A heart attack can be fatal.

Signs of a heart attack:

- Chest pain or discomfort.
- Upper body pain or discomfort in the arms, back, neck, jaw, or upper stomach.
- Shortness of breath.
- Nausea, lightheadedness, or cold sweats.

STROKE

A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain become severely reduced. Within minutes, brain cells begin to die. Prompt medical treatment can minimize brain damage and potential complications.

Signs of a stroke:

- **Sudden** numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- **Sudden** confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding.
- **Sudden** trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- **Sudden** trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- **Sudden** severe headache with no cause.

Risk factors for developing heart disease include:

- Age.** Aging increases your risk of damaged and narrowed arteries and weakened or thickened heart muscle.
- Sex.** Men are generally at greater risk of heart disease. However, women's risk increases after menopause.
- Family history** of heart disease increases your risk of coronary artery disease, especially if a parent developed it at an early age.
- Smoking.** Nicotine constricts your blood vessels, and carbon monoxide can damage their inner lining, making them more susceptible to atherosclerosis.
- Poor diet.** A diet that's high in fat, salt, sugar and cholesterol can contribute to the development of heart disease.
- High blood pressure** can result in hardening and thickening of your arteries, narrowing the vessels through which blood flows.
- High blood cholesterol levels** in your blood can increase the risk of formation of plaques and atherosclerosis.
- Diabetes** increases your risk of heart disease. Both conditions share similar risk factors, such as obesity and high blood pressure.
- Physical inactivity.** Lack of exercise also is associated with many forms of heart disease and some of its other risk factors, as well.

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