



Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disease in America

Cardiovascular disease claims more lives than any other cause of death. Over 40 percent of all deaths in the United States are caused by cardiovascular disease, which includes:

- high blood pressure
- coronary heart disease
- stroke
- rheumatic fever/rheumatic heart disease

What are the risk factors?

There are several risk factors for cardiovascular disease. The factors that are beyond your control are:

- age – approximately 4 out of 5 people who die of coronary heart disease are over age 65
- gender – men are at greater risk for heart attacks than women
- heredity (including race) – children of parents with premature development of heart disease are more likely to develop it themselves
- diabetes – greatly increases the possibility of developing cardiovascular disease

What factors can I control?

The major factors that you can control include:

- cigarette and tobacco smoking – smokers are twice as likely to suffer a heart attack and 2-4 times as likely to die from a heart attack

- high blood cholesterol levels a person's risk of coronary heart disease rises as blood cholesterol levels increase
- high blood pressure – high blood pressure makes the heart work harder and weaken over time; it also increases the risk of stroke
- physical inactivity – those with sedentary lifestyles are twice as likely to develop heart disease as people who exercise regularly
- obesity – being overweight increases the strain on the heart and affects blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and triglycerides; it also increases the risk of diabetes



What can be done?

Take charge of the risk factors that you can control.

- If you smoke, stop, and avoid frequent exposure to tobacco smoke.
- Improve your nutrition. Only 27 percent of women and 19 percent of men eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Exercise. Even light to moderate exercise can help if done regularly.

By exercising regularly, improving your diet, and not smoking, you can lower your risk of developing heart disease as well as high blood pressure, diabetes, and some forms of cancer.

The good news

See your physician to develop a heart-healthy routine that is right for you. Your physician is your best source of medical advice.

For general information, you can contact the American Heart Association at 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721), or visit www.americanheart.org.