

Heart Disease Risk Factor Reduction

Heart disease is the number one killer in America today. Certain life-styles or risk factors, as well as inherited characteristics, contribute to this disease. Identify your risk factors to make decisions about your health.

MODIFIABLE RISK FACTORS

Risk Factors That Can Be Changed

Smoking

Smokers are four times more likely to develop heart disease than nonsmokers. Smokers who have a heart attack are more likely to die and die suddenly. Nicotine causes the arteries to constrict or become smaller, reducing the flow of blood to the heart muscle. Smoking triggers the release of powerful hormones that can cause spasms in the coronary and other arteries. It allows fats and cholesterol to be deposited much more quickly in the artery wall. Nicotine causes the platelets or clotting elements in the blood to become sticky and increases the likelihood of a blood clot.

The hardest thing you may ever do is to quit smoking, but the health benefits are well worth it.

The following organizations can provide additional information about programs and support groups. American Heart Association 1-800-AHA-USA; American Cancer Society 1-800-227-2345; American Lung Association 1-800-LUNG-USA or check with your local hospital or Cardiac Rehabilitation Program.

High Cholesterol/Lipids

As blood cholesterol rises, so does risk of coronary heart disease. Know your numbers! Desirable levels are:

- Total Cholesterol below 200 mg/dl
- HDL above 40 mg/dl
- LDL below 100 mg/dl
- Triglycerides below 150 mg/dl

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure increases the heart's workload. Untreated, high blood pressure can lead to heart disease, stroke and kidney disease. To help control high blood pressure, you should maintain a healthy weight, limit salt, use alcohol in moderation and limit caffeine.

A normal blood pressure reading is 120/80.

Diabetes

Diabetes increases your risk of developing heart disease. If you have diabetes, it is important to work with your healthcare provider to manage and control blood sugar.

Fasting blood sugars should be below 110.

Stress/Anger

Response to stress may be a contributing factor for heart disease. When you encounter stress, your body prepares itself for "fight or flight" by releasing hormones that cause the heart to beat faster, blood pressure to rise, blood vessels and stomach muscles to contract. Over time this can be harmful to your heart, especially if you respond with anger or hostility.

- Learn to identify what causes stress for you.
- Talk about your problems.
- Balance work and play.
- Exercise regularly.
- Learn to say "no."
- Slow down.

Lack of Exercise

An inactive lifestyle is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. Regular exercise can help improve the way you look, feel and work. People who exercise regularly have more energy, cope more easily with stress, feel less tired, and burn extra calories to help lose weight. Walking, riding a bicycle and swimming are types of exercise that can benefit your heart.

Check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program.

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Overweight

People who have excess body fat are more likely to develop heart disease. People who gain weight around the middle are at higher risk for heart disease. Extra weight causes the heart to work harder. It can raise blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and makes development of diabetes more likely. Losing 10 to 20 pounds can help lower heart attack risk.

Alcohol

The risk of heart disease in people who drink moderate amounts of alcohol is lower than in nondrinkers. Women should limit alcohol to one drink a day and men should limit to two a day. One drink is defined as 1½ ounces of 80-proof spirits, 1 ounce of 100 proof spirits, 4 ounces of wine or 12 ounces of beer.

Drinking too much alcohol can raise blood pressure, cause heart failure and contribute to high triglycerides.

It is not recommended that non-drinkers start using alcohol or that drinkers increase the amount they drink.

NON - MODIFIABLE RISK FACTORS

Risk Factors That Cannot Be Changed

Increasing Age

Aging causes changes in the heart and blood vessels. The older we become, the greater the chance for a heart attack.

Gender

Men have a greater risk of heart attack at a younger age than women. The risk of a heart attack for a woman increases after menopause.

Heredity

Heart disease tends to run in families. If your parents or siblings had a heart attack before age 55 (men) or 65 (women) you are at an increased risk for heart disease.

For more information about your risk factors, please talk to your physician or nurse. Or, call the Cardiovascular Educators at 919-350-8604.



Heart Center

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