



Heart Health

Heart disease and stroke

The No. 1 killer in America is heart disease. This is any disease that affects the heart and blood vessels. One example is heart attack. This is a blockage of blood to the heart that causes the heart muscle to die. Another example is stroke, the No. 3 killer in the U.S. A stroke is a blockage of blood to the brain or a burst blood vessel in the brain. This kills brain cells and limits people's lives in severe ways.¹

Reduce your risk factors: The ABCs of prevention²

Avoid tobacco (smoking or chewing)

Become more active

Choose good eating habits

Leading a heart-healthy life is important. It may help you avoid heart disease, heart attack and stroke. Keep in mind that the heart is a muscle. Like other muscles, you want to keep it strong and healthy. This can be done with a physically active lifestyle and good eating habits. Below are a few ways to help your heart:³

- Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week, if not all.
- Eat a diet rich in vegetables and fruits.
- Choose whole-grain, high-fiber foods.
- Eat fish at least twice a week.
- Cut back on drinks and foods with added sugars.
- Try to avoid foods that list any kind of partially hydrogenated oil on the label. This will help you reduce trans fat in your diet.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt.
- If you smoke or chew tobacco, quit.



Know the signs of heart attack and stroke⁴

Heart disease affects men and women of all ages, races and income levels. One way to reduce your risk is to know the warning signs.

Signs of a heart attack⁵

- Chest discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes — sometimes it goes away and comes back or it can feel like heavy pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body including pain or pressure in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness, breaking out in a cold sweat or getting an upset stomach

Signs of a stroke⁶

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, mainly 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 known cause

If you think you or a loved one may be in crisis, do not take no for an answer. Call 911 quickly. If there is no 911 service where you live, call the crisis number in your telephone book.

Treatment

Today there are many new treatments that help heart attack and stroke victims. One is a clot-busting drug that may stop some heart attacks and strokes in progress, helping to preserve normal function and save lives. To work, these drugs must be given right after the first sign of a heart attack or stroke.

High blood pressure⁷



Nearly a third of U.S. adults have high blood pressure. High blood pressure has no symptoms, so you may not be aware that it's damaging your arteries, heart and other organs. In fact, heart disease is often called the “silent killer.”

If high blood pressure is not treated, it may lead to other problems. These include stroke, heart attack, heart failure or kidney failure. Talk to your doctor about getting your blood pressure checked. This is the best way to know if there is a problem.

Although this illness can often be treated with medication and lifestyle modifications, the causes are still not known. But some things may put you at risk.

- **Heredity:** People whose parents have high blood pressure are more likely to get it than those whose parents do not.
- **Race:** African-Americans are more likely to have high blood pressure than Caucasians.
- **Being male:** A higher percentage of men than women have high blood pressure until 45 years of age. From ages 45 – 64, the percentages of men and women with high blood pressure are similar. After age 64, a much higher percentage of women have it than men.
- **Increasing age:** Blood pressure tends to increase with age. Older people are more likely to have high blood pressure.
- **Sodium (salt) sensitivity**
- **Obesity and being overweight**

Know your blood pressure

Blood pressure is always listed as two numbers — one on top of the other. Here is what you should be aiming for:

Top number (systolic): less than 120

Bottom number (diastolic): less than 80

There is also something called pre-high blood pressure. This is when your top number is between 120 and 139 and your bottom number is between 80 and 89.

High blood pressure is when your top number is 140 or above and your bottom number is 90 or above.

Cholesterol⁸

This is a soft, waxy substance found in the bloodstream and in all your body's cells. It is a key part of a healthy body. It helps to form cell membranes and some hormones. It is also needed for other functions.



Too much cholesterol in your blood is a major health risk. It may lead to heart disease, which may lead to heart attack. A simple test is used to check cholesterol levels in the blood. If your levels are high, treatment may help. Changes in diet and the use of medicine works well for most people.

Two kinds of cholesterol

- Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) is known as bad cholesterol. A high level of it (160 mg/dL and above) means an increased risk of heart disease. Lower levels of LDL mean a lower risk of heart disease.
- High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is known as good cholesterol. This is because a high level of it seems to protect against heart attack. On the other hand, a low HDL level means a greater risk of heart attack. (Low is less than 40 mg/dL in men and less than 50 mg/dL in women.) A low HDL level also may raise the risk of stroke.

Find Out More



American Heart Association
www.heart.org

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention
www.cdc.gov/heartdisease

National Heart, Lung and Blood
Institute
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp

Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease
www.fightchronicdisease.org

WomenHeart: The National Coalition
for Women with Heart Disease
www.womenheart.org