



Risks for Heart Disease

What is heart disease?

Heart disease is a general term used to describe many disorders that affect the heart. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States.

The most common cause of heart disease is narrowing or blockage of the heart's blood vessels. This is the most common reason people have heart attacks.

Your risk for heart disease can be reduced through lifestyle changes. Here are the risk factors for heart disease. Talk with your health care provider about how you can lower your risk.

Risk factors you can control

The following are risk factors for heart disease and what you can do to control them.

- **Smoking:** Any amount of smoking increases your chance of having heart disease. If you smoke, talk with your health care provider about quitting.
- **High blood pressure:** High blood pressure can damage the heart vessels causing them to narrow. If you have high blood pressure, work with your health care provider to get it under control.
- **Little physical activity:** Regular physical activity is important to keeping your heart healthy. Ask your health care provider how much physical activity is right for you.
- **High cholesterol:** High levels of cholesterol in your blood can cause narrowing of the heart's blood vessels. Talk with your health care provider about your cholesterol levels.
- **Diabetes:** Having diabetes increases your risk of heart disease. If you have diabetes, work with your health care provider to keep it under good control.
- **Being overweight:** Being overweight increases your risk of developing heart disease. Ask your health care provider what a healthy weight is for you.
- **Poor diet:** Diets high in fat, salt, and cholesterol can increase your risk of heart disease. Eating a diet low in salt, cholesterol, and saturated fat, and high in fruits, vegetables, fiber, and potassium may help reduce your risk of heart disease. Ask your health care provider about a healthy diet for you.

Risk factors you cannot control

- **Age:** As you get older your risk of heart disease increases.
- **Gender:** Men are at greater risk for heart disease than women. However, after menopause a woman's risk increases.
- **Family history:** If other members of your family have heart disease it could increase your risk.

What next?

Millions of Americans are at risk for developing heart disease. Talk with your health care provider about the above risk factors and what you can do to lower your risk for heart disease.

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