

Heart and blood vessel disease is the #1 cause of death in both men and women. Risk factors are lifestyle habits and/or characteristics that make individuals more prone to developing heart and blood vessel disease. It is important to recognize and control risk factors in order to decrease your risk for heart attack and stroke. Risk factors for heart disease can be divided into:

- ♥ Those you can not change
- ♥ Those you can change or control

Risk Factors We Can Not Change

Age:

- ♥ Heart artery disease begins to develop when we are children.
- ♥ Risk factors speed up the development of coronary artery heart disease.
- ♥ People without risk factors can still develop heart disease as a normal result of aging.
- ♥ Think of it this way: Lime deposits in the plumbing of an 80 year-old house will be greater than in a 20-year-old house.

Gender:

- ♥ Men have the tendency to develop heart disease before women. However, more women die from coronary heart artery disease than men.
- ♥ Women have a natural hormonal protection that keeps their LDL (bad) cholesterol down and increases the HDL (good) cholesterol. However, once menopause occurs, this protective mechanism stops and women have an increase in heart disease.
- ♥ The risk for having coronary artery disease is the same in men and women by the time women reach 70 years of age.

Ethnic Origin:

- ♥ African-Americans have a higher risk of heart disease and stroke than Caucasians.
- ♥ Compared to Caucasian women, African-American women have higher death rates from cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease and stroke.
- ♥ Heart disease risks are high among Mexican Americans, American Indians and native Hawaiians. This is partly due to higher rates of obesity and diabetes.
- ♥ White men die more frequently from coronary artery disease than do men of color.

Family History:

- ♥ You are at increased risk if you have an immediate blood relative (parent, grandparent, brother, sister) who has had a heart attack or stroke?
- ♥ If your brother, father or grandfather had a heart attack before age 55, or your sister, mother or grandmother had one before age 65, you may be at risk too.
- ♥ Most people with a strong family history of heart disease and stroke have at least one other risk factor. Just as you can't control your age, sex and race, you can't control your family history.



That is why it is even more important to treat and control any other risk factors you have.

Risk Factors We Can Change or Control

Smoking:

- ♥ The best way to save your heart is to avoid tobacco!
- ♥ Those who smoke one pack of cigarettes per day double or triple their risk of having a heart attack when compared to non-smokers.
- ♥ Smokers are more likely to die of heart disease than non-smokers.
- ♥ The risk of heart attack decreases by 50 percent within 24-hours of quitting smoking.
- ♥ After two years of abstinence from tobacco, the risk of heart disease is decreased to about the level of non- smokers.
 - The risk of lung cancer is decreased by 80 to 90 percent after 15-plus years of abstinence.
 - Lung capacity declines with age more rapidly in smokers than in non-smokers. In other words, quitting helps the lungs age slower.
 - The senses of smell and taste improve within days of abstinence.

High Blood Pressure: (The Silent Killer)

- ♥ Too much pressure in the arteries can damage the smooth lining, thus leading to heart artery disease.
- ♥ If you are on blood pressure medicine, don't stop taking it unless your doctor says it is OK.
- ♥ The acceptable range for blood pressure is less than 120 systolic and less than 80 diastolic.

High Levels of Cholesterol in the Blood:

- ♥ Excess cholesterol in the blood is deposited on the inside walls of the heart arteries and, in time, leads to blockages.
- ♥ Dietary cholesterol comes from animal products.
- ♥ Total cholesterol should be below 180 if you have known coronary artery disease.
- ♥ Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL) the "bad cholesterol" should be below 70 in those with known coronary artery disease and/or diabetes.
- ♥ High Density Lipoprotein (HDL) the "good cholesterol" should be above 40 for men and above 50 for women. The higher the number the better!

Excess Body Fat:

Being overweight has a major affect on other risk factors.

It can cause:

- ♥ High blood pressure
- ♥ Elevated blood cholesterol
- ♥ Diabetes

Inability to Manage Stress:

- ♥ The outside pressures in life are called stressors.
- ♥ Stress is created by our reaction to those outside pressures.
- ♥ Stress cannot be totally eliminated, but you can learn to manage it.
- ♥ Not all stress is bad.

Diabetes:

- ♥ Diabetes is a condition that occurs when the body cannot use sugar properly.
- ♥ Heart disease is the number one cause of death in diabetics.



Lack of Exercise:

There is a significant link between inactivity and increased incidence of coronary heart disease.

The best exercise for the heart is activity that:

- ♥ Lasts 30 to 60 minutes (non-stop)
- ♥ Uses large muscle groups
- ♥ Is rhythmic
- ♥ Causes the heart rate and breathing to increase
- ♥ Regular exercise protects us against heart disease by:
 - Making the heart, lungs and body work together more efficiently
 - Improving blood cholesterol levels
 - Reducing blood pressure
 - Improving blood sugar levels in diabetics
 - Reducing excess body fat
 - Improving stress management



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