

Heart Disease

Know YOUR risk factors

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among middle-aged and older men and among women over age 60. Significant risk factors for heart disease include:



- **Age.** Men over age 45 and women over age 55 are at greater risk for heart disease.



- **Family history.** Talk to your parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles about who has had a heart attack, stroke or other serious health problem. With this information, your doctor can recommend screening tests and preventive treatments as appropriate.



- **High blood pressure.** If your blood pressure is high, losing weight, exercising, not smoking and, in some cases, cutting down on sodium (salt) and alcohol will help. Some people may also need to take medicine to control their blood pressure.



- **High cholesterol.** If you don't know your cholesterol level, ask your doctor if it should be checked. To reduce (and prevent) a high cholesterol level, limit how much cholesterol and fat you eat and exercise regularly. Some people who have high cholesterol levels may also need to take medicine to keep their levels under control.



- **Smoking.** Quitting is the single best change you can make for your health. Talk to your family doctor about how to quit and stay tobacco-free. If you live with a smoker, breathing his or her smoke also affects your health. Encourage the other person to quit.



- **Poor diet.** A diet high in fat and cholesterol has been linked with heart disease. Fat and cholesterol can harden and clog your arteries. A healthy diet is high in fiber and natural un-processed foods.



- **Excess weight and inactivity.** Being overweight puts extra strain on your heart and blood vessels. A high-fiber, low-fat diet and regular exercise can help you lose weight gradually and keep it off. Talk to your doctor or physical therapist about safe ways to lose weight.

- **Other health problems (such as diabetes)**

Take a moment to look at your lifestyle, family history and general health. With this information, you and your family doctor can assess your risk and make a plan to tackle potential problems.

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What can I do to lower my risk of Coronary Heart Disease (CHD)?



1. **Don't smoke.** Nicotine raises your blood pressure because it causes your body to release adrenaline, which makes your blood vessels constrict and your heart beat faster. If you smoke, ask your doctor to help you make a plan to quit. After 2 or 3 years of not smoking, your risk of CHD will be as low as the risk of a person who never smoked.



2. **Control your blood pressure.** If you have high blood pressure, your doctor can suggest ways to lower it. If you're taking medicine for high blood pressure, be sure to take it just the way your doctor tells you to.



3. **Exercise.** Regular exercise can make your heart stronger and reduce your risk of heart disease. Exercise can also help if you have high blood pressure. Before you start, talk to your doctor about the right kind of exercise for you. Try to exercise at least 4 to 6 times a week for at least 30 minutes each time.



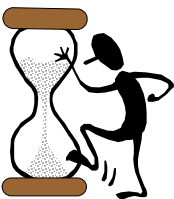
4. **Ask your doctor about taking a low dose of aspirin each day.** Aspirin helps prevent CHD, however taking it also has some risks.

5. **Ask your doctor about taking vitamin supplements.** Some studies have shown that vitamin E may lower a person's risk of having a heart attack. Other vitamins may also help protect against CHD.



6. **Eat a healthy diet.** Add foods to your diet that are low in cholesterol and saturated fats, because your body turns saturated fats into cholesterol. Eating fiber with fatty foods has been shown to decrease the absorption of fat.

What if changing these things doesn't help?



Be patient! Your body will need time to respond to the changes you've made. Your doctor will watch your progress. If your cholesterol level hasn't improved after 6 months to 1 year, your doctor may prescribe medicine to lower your cholesterol. However, you will still need to keep up the healthy lifestyle changes you've started to help the medicine work.