

HEART DISEASE: KNOW YOUR RISK

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

WHAT IS CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE?

Coronary artery disease (also called CAD or coronary heart disease) is caused by a thickening of the inside walls of the coronary arteries, the blood vessels that carry blood to the heart muscle. A fatty substance called plaque builds up inside the thickened walls of the arteries, blocking or slowing the flow of blood. If your heart muscle doesn't get enough blood to work properly, you may have angina or a heart attack.



WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR CAD?

In the United States, heart disease is the leading cause of death for women and men. Risk factors for heart disease include:

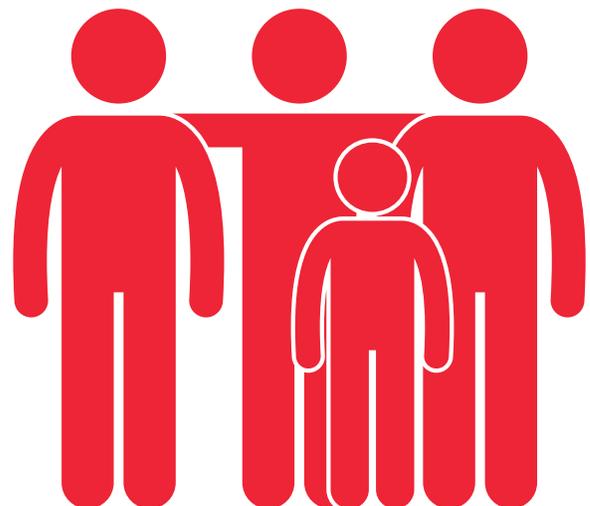
- Age
- Family history
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- Poor diet
- Overweight or obesity
- Inactivity (sedentary lifestyle)
- Other health problems (such as diabetes)

AGE IS MORE THAN A NUMBER

Men older than 45 years of age and women older than 55 years of age (or who have gone through menopause) are at greater risk for heart disease. Also, the rates of heart attack over the last 20 years have been increasing for women 35 to 54 years of age.

KNOW YOUR HEALTH FAMILY TREE

You can't change your family history. But it is important for you to know what "runs in the family" and to tell your doctor. Talk to your parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles about who in your family has had a heart attack, stroke or other serious health problem. With this information, your doctor can recommend the best kinds of screening tests and preventive treatments.



KEEPING IT UNDER CONTROL—BLOOD PRESSURE AND CHOLESTEROL

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

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

HABITS TO GET AND STAY HEALTHY

Stop 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.

Diet and Exercise

A healthy diet includes vegetables, fruits, meats, fish, beans, whole grains, and healthy fats. Limit the amount of processed foods (such as hot dogs), white flour (such as crackers and white bread) and sweet or sugary foods (such as soda and dessert foods) you eat. You may also need to avoid foods that are high in sodium, which can increase blood pressure. Sodium is found in table salt and many prepared foods, especially canned foods. Limit how much alcohol you drink. This means no more than one alcoholic drink per day for women, and two alcoholic drinks a day for men.

Exercise can help prevent heart disease and many other health problems. You'll also feel better and help keep your weight under control if you exercise regularly. If you haven't exercised for a while or have health problems, talk to your doctor before you start an exercise program. Exercising 30 to 60 minutes, 4 to 6 times a week is a good goal, but any amount is better than none.

SPEAK UP! PARTNERING WITH YOUR FAMILY DOCTOR

Health problems such as diabetes can contribute to heart disease. Talk to your family doctor for individual advice.

Rest assured that these lifestyle changes will lower your CAD risk, even if you don't feel any different. Your body will also need time to respond to the changes you've made. Your doctor will watch your progress.



REFERENCES

All information sourced from FamilyDoctor.org, a resource operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP)