

Heart Health

In the United States, heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women. People with pre-diabetes and/or the metabolic syndrome are at higher risk for developing heart disease. The good news is that leading a healthy lifestyle can reduce your risk!

What is heart disease?

- Heart disease, also known as cardiovascular disease, is a group of diseases and conditions that affect the heart (cardio) and blood vessels (vascular).
- Examples: heart attack, high blood pressure, and stroke.

Risk Factors:

The American Heart Association has identified the following risk factors:

- Increasing age
- Sex (male)
- Heredity (including race)
- Smoking
- Physical inactivity
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Obesity and Overweight

Many risk factors can be controlled by being physically active and eating a healthy diet. A heart-healthy lifestyle is your best defense against heart disease.

Facts about Cholesterol

- Cholesterol is a soft, waxy substance. Your liver makes all the cholesterol your body needs each day. You also get cholesterol from animal foods you eat, such as meat, fish, poultry, egg yolk, and dairy products.
- HDL (high-density lipoprotein), “good cholesterol”, removes cholesterol from the body, preventing it from building up in the arteries thus protecting against heart disease.
- LDL (low-density lipoprotein), “bad cholesterol”, carries harmful cholesterol in the blood. High levels can lead to blockages in the arteries, thus increasing the risk of heart disease.
- Triglycerides are the most common type of fat in the body. High levels may increase the risk of heart disease.

Facts about Blood Pressure

- Blood pressure is the force exerted against the walls of the blood vessels as blood flows through.
- Blood pressure is measured with two readings:
 - Systolic (upper number) is the pressure against the walls of the arteries during a contraction or heart beat.
 - Diastolic (lower number) is the pressure against the walls of the arteries during the relaxation phase (the heart is at rest between beats).
- High blood pressure is called the “silent killer” because there are usually no symptoms to warn you something is wrong.

Preventing or Managing Heart Disease

The American Heart Association identified seven steps, called “Life’s Simple 7™”, to improve health. These guidelines reflect those established for the GLB program.

1. Eat a healthy diet
 - Eat at least 4.5 cups of fruits and vegetables a day.
 - Have at least two 3.5 ounce servings of fish a week (preferably oily fish).
 - Eat at least 3 servings of fiber-rich whole grains a day.
 - Limit sugar-sweetened beverages to not more than 450 calories (36 ounces) per week.
 - Eat less than 1500 mg of sodium a day.
2. Maintain a healthy body weight
3. Take charge of cholesterol
 - Goals for cholesterol - Think 50, 100, 150, 200
 - HDL – greater than 50 mg/dL (for women)
 - Greater than 40 mg/dL (for men)
 - LDL – less than 130 mg/dL (under 100 mg/dL is optimal)
 - Triglycerides – less than 150 mg/dL
 - Total cholesterol – less than 200 mg/dL
 - a. Testing is recommended starting at age 20.
 - b. Have your cholesterol profile done at least every five years to age 40, then every year.
4. Manage blood pressure
 - Normal - less than 120/80 mm/Hg
 - Pre-hypertension - 120-139/80-89 mm/Hg
 - High blood pressure/hypertension - 140/90 mm/Hg or higher
5. Keep blood sugar, or glucose, at healthy levels
 - Normal fasting blood glucose – under 100 mg/dl
 - Pre-diabetes – 100-125 mg/dl
 - Diabetes – 126 mg/dl or higher
6. Engage in regular physical activity
 - The American Heart Association suggests at least
 1. 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 days each week.
 2. Regular physical activity improves risk factors
 - such as blood pressure and cholesterol and blood
 - glucose levels. It also strengthens your heart
 - muscle, improves blood circulation, reduces
 - feelings of stress, and helps control body weight.
7. Don't smoke

Even one lifestyle change can make a difference. A combination of two or more lifestyle changes may achieve even better results.