

Risk Factors for Heart Disease

A risk factor is something that increases your chance of having heart disease. You can't control some risk factors, such as age and a family history of heart disease. But most, including those listed below, are things you can control.

Unhealthy Cholesterol Levels

Cholesterol is a fatty substance in your blood. It can build up inside your arteries and block the blood flow to your heart or brain. Your risk of heart disease goes up if you don't have enough HDL cholesterol. You're also at risk if you have high levels of LDL cholesterol or triglycerides.



Smoking

This is the most important risk factor you can change. Smoking damages your arteries. It reduces blood flow to your heart and brain. It greatly increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, lung disease, and cancer.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure occurs when blood pushes too hard against artery walls as it passes through the arteries. This damages the artery lining. High blood pressure raises your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Metabolic Syndrome

This combination risk factors puts you at extra high risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. You have metabolic syndrome if you have three or more of the following: low HDL cholesterol; high triglycerides; high blood pressure; high blood sugar; extra weight around the waist.

Diabetes

Diabetes occurs when you have high levels of sugar (glucose) in your blood. This can damage arteries if not kept under control.

Excess Weight

Excess weight makes other risk factors, such as diabetes, more likely. Excess weight around the waist or stomach increases your heart disease risk the most.

Lack of Physical Activity

When you're not active, you're more likely to develop diabetes, high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol levels, and excess weight.

10 Tips for Being a Wise Health Care Consumer

1. Take time to carefully select a doctor or health care provider. Ask friends or relatives for recommendations. Investigate whether or not the doctor participates with your health insurance plan.
2. Prepare for visits to your health care provider by compiling lists of questions or concerns you wish to discuss during your appointment. By making the most of the time you have, you can avoid unnecessary calls and repeat visits.
3. Ask questions about medications you are prescribed. Understand why you are taking it and how it should be taken. Finish all medications, even if you are feeling better.
4. Keep a checklist of all medications you are taking and share this list with your health care provider. This is especially important if you are seeing more than one doctor.
5. Be aware of routine medical tests and examinations, and the recommended times to have them. You may be able to avoid unnecessary and expensive tests.
6. Use home medical tests when available. They are less costly and can be used without a visit to the doctor.
7. Keep a well stocked home "pharmacy" with commonly used medicinal items. This can help you deal with common problems and save costly trips to the doctor or emergency room.
8. Understand your health insurance plan. A list of basic questions about what is covered and knowing the answers to these questions can save time and money,
9. Take care of your mental health as well as you would your physical health. States of emotional upset can interfere with daily living routines, and can ultimately affect your physical well being.
10. Keep a list of health agencies handy as a reference. Most are available by phone, fax or email and can serve as a resource for free information and support.



National Wear Red Day Coming February 5

Join with millions of women, as well as companies, organizations and cities across America on

**National Wear Red Day,
Friday, Feb 5, 2016.**

By wearing red and making a donation, you'll help the American Heart Association support ongoing research and education about women and heart disease.



Plan a Wear Red Day

It's easy to be a part of this special day. Consider organizing a National Wear Red Day at your workplace, with your faith-based organization, at your community center or in your home.

The American Heart Association has made it simple with free, downloadable tools at www.goredforwomen.org/. Use them anytime of the year to host your own Wear Red Day event. It's a great way to raise awareness and help us fight our No. 1 killer - heart disease.