

Heart Disease

February is American Heart Month. Coronary heart disease, often called heart disease happens when the arteries that supply blood to the heart become clogged with a buildup of fat, cholesterol and other substances. This buildup is called plaque. As the plaque builds up, blood flow to the heart is reduced. Heart disease can lead to a heart attack. According to the American Heart Association, heart disease is the number one killer in the United States, with women accounting for more than half of these deaths.

The good news is you have tremendous power to prevent heart disease. There are risk factors that make a person more likely to develop the disease. These risk factors can also increase the chance of making an existing condition worse. There are six important risk factors for heart disease that you can control. These are cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, being overweight, physical inactivity, and diabetes. More than 95% of those who die of heart disease have at least one of these risk factors. Two other risk factors that you have no control over are age and a family history of heart disease. Four of every five deaths due to heart disease occur in people older than 65.

Having more than one risk factor is serious because the risk factors influence each other. Having two risk factors increases the chances of developing heart disease by four times. Having three risk factors increases the chances of developing heart disease by ten times. The message is clear, everyone needs to take their risk of heart disease seriously and take action now to reduce that risk. Below is a quick quiz to find out your risk of a heart attack.

Questions	Yes	No	Don't Know
1. Do you smoke?			
2. Is your blood pressure 140/90 mmHg or higher, OR have you been told by your doctor that your blood pressure is too high?			
3. Has your doctor told you that your LDL ("bad") cholesterol is too high, OR that your total cholesterol level is 200 mg/dL or higher, OR that your HDL ("good") cholesterol is less than 40 mg/dL?			
4. Has your father or brother had a heart attack before age 55, OR has your mother or sister had one before age 65?			
5. Do you have diabetes OR a fasting blood sugar of 126 mg/dL or higher, OR do you need medicine to control your blood sugar?			
6. Are you over 55 years old?			
7. Do you have a body mass index (BMI) score of 25 or more? Visit www.mayoclinic.com/health/bmi-calculator/NU00597			
8. Do you get less than a total of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days?			
9. Has a doctor told you that you have angina (chest pains), OR have you had a heart attack?			

If you checked any of the "yes" boxes, you're at an increased risk of having a heart attack. If you checked "don't know" for any questions, ask your doctor for help in answering them. Your doctor can also assist you in addressing any of the questions you answered yes. Protecting your heart doesn't have to be complicated. It can be as easy as taking a brisk walk, increasing the servings of vegetables eaten by having a salad every day, or getting the support you need to quit smoking or maintain a healthy weight. More information is available at the following websites: www.americanheart.org/, www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000147.htm, and www.cdc.gov/heartdisease.

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