

Understanding Heart Disease



Heart disease, such as coronary artery disease, heart attack, congestive heart failure, and congestive heart disease, is the leading cause of death for both men and women according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The good news is that even modest changes to your diet and lifestyle can improve your heart health and lower your risk.

Signs and Symptoms of Heart Disease

Mayo Clinic lists the following as signs or symptoms of heart disease. See your doctor right away if you experience any of the following:

- Chest pain, tightness, pressure, or discomfort
- Shortness of breath
- Pain, numbness, weakness, or coldness in your legs or arms
- Pain in the neck, jaw, throat, upper abdomen, or back

Preventing Heart Disease

Do not smoke – If you smoke, quit. Smoking can raise your risk for heart disease and heart attack, and worsen other heart disease risk factors.

Aim for a healthy weight – The more you weigh and the more body fat you have, the more likely you are to develop coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, breathing problems, and certain cancers.

Get moving – Regular physical activity can help you lose weight, improve your physical fitness, lower your LDL cholesterol levels, increase your HDL cholesterol levels, manage high blood pressure, lower stress, improve your mental health, and reduce your risk for other conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, depression and cancer.

Eat for your heart – A heart-healthy diet includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fish, lean meats, nuts and seeds, and limits sodium, saturated and trans fats, sugar, and alcohol.

Manage stress – Stress can contribute to high blood pressure and other heart disease risk factors. Learn how to manage stress and cope with problems by exercising, practicing meditation, participating in a stress management program, talking with family, friends, community, or religious support groups, or by talking with a professional counselor.

Making lifestyle changes can help prevent or treat heart disease. Talk with your doctor about your risk and what you can do to lower it.



Aim for a healthy weight. If you are overweight or obese, you are more likely to develop heart disease.

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