

HEART HEALTH

Risk Factors

Did you know that heart disease is the leading cause of death for BOTH men and women in the United States? Nearly 2,400 Americans die of heart disease each day. There are a range of risk factors that can increase your risk of heart disease. The more risk factors you have, the greater your chances of developing heart disease or having a heart attack or stroke.

RISK FACTORS YOU CAN CONTROL

These risk factors can be controlled or treated with help from your health care professional. You can modify others by changing your lifestyle.

- Cholesterol
- Blood Pressure
- Smoking
- Low Physical Activity
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Stress
- Birth Control Pills
- Alcohol & Illegal Drugs

RISK FACTORS YOU CAN'T CONTROL

- Age
- Gender
- Heredity and Race

How Does Heart Disease Happen?

Hheart disease occurs when plaque (deposits of fat-like substances) form in the heart's arteries. This is called atherosclerosis (ath'er-o-skleh-RO'sis); it causes the heart's arteries to narrow, slowing the blood flow to the heart muscle. To compensate the heart often has to beat harder or faster. If an artery becomes blocked by plaque or blood trying to squeeze through a narrowed spot, a heart attack or stroke can happen, depending where the blood is headed (to the heart or brain). Weakened artery walls caused by high blood pressure, may break causing a hemorrhage or aneurysm. While there are many risk factors that can increase your chances of heart disease, the good news is that most of them are controllable. See the list to the left for more information.

Blood Pressure

What is high blood pressure?

Blood pressure is recorded with two numbers referred to as systolic (sis-TOL-ic) and diastolic (dia-STOL-ic) pressure. These numbers represent the force of blood that is pushing against the artery walls. The systolic number is when the heart is working and diastolic is when the heart is at rest. Normal blood pressure is 120/80 mmHG (systolic/diastolic). Slightly higher is considered prehypertensive and most doctors recommend lifestyle changes to help lower it.

Hypertension is a term for high blood pressure. When hypertension is not treated, it can cause heart attacks, stroke, kidney disease and occasionally death. Nearly one in three American adults have hypertension. Hypertension is classified as blood pressure that is 140/90 mmHG or higher at three separate readings or doctor visits. Both numbers are important; if either number is higher than it should be, it may indicate hypertension.

Cholesterol

What is cholesterol?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that occurs naturally throughout your body. A total cholesterol level under 200 is desirable, and over 240 is high.

HDL cholesterol, or "good" cholesterol, carries cholesterol away from the arteries and removes cholesterol from the blood. Unlike total and LDL cholesterol, you want your HDL levels to be high. High levels of HDL have been found to protect against heart attacks and heart disease.

LDL cholesterol, often dubbed "bad" cholesterol, contains large amounts of fats that deposit cholesterol in the arteries as it circulates. Eating too many foods that are high in saturated and trans fats and cholesterol can also increase LDL levels in your body. A high LDL level is above 160 mg/dL.

Triglycerides are a form of fat. High triglyceride levels usually lead to high overall cholesterol. High triglyceride levels are considered anything above 160 mg/dL.



LOWER YOUR CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

There are two main ways to approach lowering your cholesterol. One is through therapeutic lifestyle changes (TLC) such as diet, exercise and weight management. Another approach is through medication. If an individual is diagnosed with high cholesterol, the first course of action is usually TLC.

REDUCE TOTAL FAT Limit fat intake to less than 30% of your total daily calories.

REDUCE SATURATED FAT Saturated fats raise total cholesterol levels because they boost both LDL and HDL levels. Saturated fat is found in the following types of food: red meat, seafood, full-fat dairy products, poultry skin, egg yolks and processed bakery goods like cookie and crackers. Avoid any foods with “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” oils.

REPLACE SATURATED FATS Unsaturated fats such as olive, peanut, corn and canola oil and nuts raise HDL levels and lower LDL levels. Another unsaturated fat, omega-3, found in fish has been shown to reduce risk of death by 25 percent if a person suffers a heart attack. When cooking, bake or broil instead of frying. Spreading bread with non-fat cream cheese or dipping in olive oil are also great ways to replace saturated fats.

REDUCE DIETARY CHOLESTEROL Try to reduce cholesterol to 300 milligrams per day. Try avoiding dairy products made with whole milk and organ meats like liver.

EXERCISE Regular exercise is an important aspect of maintaining your health. Exercise, along side of a healthy diet, can reduce cholesterol levels up to 15%. Other benefits include: lower blood pressure, weight loss and improvement in overall fitness.

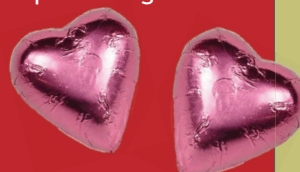


Heart Healthy Foods

While some foods may not lower cholesterol, they are heart healthy in other ways. Try eating fish twice a week. The omega-3 fatty acids in fish such as salmon and sardines can lower triglycerides. Fish may also reduce blood clots, prevent arrhythmias (irregular heartbeats), lower inflammation and decrease blood pressure. Caution: Pregnant women and children should avoid fish with high mercury content.

Give your valentine some dark chocolate. Chocolate is rich in flavonoids and antioxidants that help keep bad LDL cholesterol from forming in your arteries. Select the dark chocolate over milk chocolate, because it contains the highest percentage of cocoa.

Source: Remedy, Winter 2009 p 37.



10 ways to reduce sodium

Sodium plays a vital role in your everyday health. Scientists suggest that the body needs about 250-500mg of sodium a day for basic functions. Too much sodium, however, and the kidneys compensate by releasing more water into the blood, which in turn increases blood pressure. Not good.

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans here are the recommended daily sodium intake levels:

Daily sodium limit for seniors:
1/2 tsp salt = 1,200mg sodium

Daily sodium limit for adults:
1 tsp salt = 2,300mg sodium

Daily sodium the average American consumes:
1 1/2 tsp = 4,000mg sodium

Tips to lowering your sodium intake

1. Ask how food is prepared when eating out. You may be able to request that they hold the salt.
2. Choose low-sodium, reduced sodium or no-salt added foods when possible
3. Eat fresh or frozen vegetables
4. Limit how much canned, smoked and processed meat you eat
5. Cook rice and pasta without adding salt
6. Rinse canned foods such as beans and vegetables
7. Use other flavors instead of salt. Try experimenting with spices and herbs.
8. Limit condiments with high salt content, such as barbecue sauce, mustard, teriyaki sauce, soy sauce and ketchup.
9. Cut back on convenience foods, frozen dinners, processed foods and instant meals.
10. Remove the salt shaker from the table so you aren't tempted to use it.