

Know the Risk Factors for Heart Disease That You Can Control



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SMOKING

If you smoke, resolve to quit. Smoking cigarettes puts you at much greater risk for having a heart attack, and it's the single greatest cause of preventable death in the United States. Constant exposure to other people's tobacco smoke also increases your risk — even if you don't smoke. If you're a woman who uses birth control pills and you smoke, your risk is even higher. The bottom line: If you don't smoke, don't start. And if you do smoke, quit! When you stop smoking — no matter how long or how much you've smoked — your risk of heart attack drops.

HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Know your numbers to know your risk. A simple blood test can show if your blood cholesterol level is desirable, borderline-high or high.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Have your blood pressure checked each time you visit your doctor. High blood pressure is often called the "silent killer" because it has no symptoms. After age 55, a much higher percentage of women than men have high blood pressure.

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

Get up and get moving. Nearly 26 percent of all women are sedentary. The U.S. Surgeon General recommends at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most, and preferably all, days of the week. Regular physical activity helps reduce your risk of heart attack, heart disease and stroke.

OBESITY

Obesity isn't an appearance issue, it's a health issue. Obesity is a major health problem for all Americans, including children. Among women ages 20 and older, 57.6 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 79.6 percent of non-Hispanic blacks and 73 percent of Mexican Americans are overweight or obese (have a body mass index of 25.0 kg/m² or higher). If you're obese or overweight, you have a much higher risk of developing heart disease.

DIABETES

Have your glucose levels checked regularly, especially if diabetes runs in your family. A simple blood test done at the doctor's office can show if you're at risk. Among women age 20 and older, about 5.6 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 13.2 of non-Hispanic blacks and 10.9 of Mexican Americans have physician-diagnosed diabetes. About 22 million women are estimated to have pre-diabetes.