



What are the Risk Factors?

Gender

Men have a greater risk of heart attack than women do, and they have attacks earlier in life. Women are at a greater risk after menopause, when women's death rate from heart disease increases.

Heredity/Race

Children of parents with heart disease are more likely to develop it themselves. African Americans have more severe high blood pressure than Caucasians and a higher risk of heart disease. Heart disease risk is also higher among Mexican Americans, American Indians, native Hawaiians and some Asian Americans. This is partly due to higher rates of obesity and diabetes. Most people with a strong family history of heart disease have one or more other risk factors.

Smoking

Cigarette smoking is a powerful independent risk factor for sudden cardiac death in patients with coronary heart disease; smokers have about twice the risk of nonsmokers. Cigarette smoking also acts with other risk factors to greatly increase the risk for coronary heart disease. Exposure to other people's smoke increases the risk of heart disease even for nonsmokers.

High Cholesterol

As blood cholesterol rises, so does risk of coronary heart disease. Your total cholesterol should be below 200 mg/dL, and your HDL (good) cholesterol should be 40 mg/dL or higher.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure increases the heart's workload, causing the heart to thicken and become stiffer. It also increases your risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney failure and congestive heart failure.

Physical Inactivity

An inactive lifestyle is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. Regular, moderate-to-vigorous physical activity helps prevent heart and blood vessel disease. Physical activity can help control blood cholesterol, diabetes and obesity, as well as help lower blood pressure in some people.

Obesity & Overweight

People who have excess body fat — especially if a lot of it is at the waist — are more likely to develop heart disease and stroke even if they have no other risk factors. Excess weight increases the heart's work. It also raises blood pressure and blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and lowers HDL ("good") cholesterol levels. It can also make diabetes more likely to develop.

Diabetes

Diabetes seriously increases your risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Even when glucose (blood sugar) levels are under control, diabetes increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, but the risks are even greater if blood sugar is not well controlled. About three-quarters of people with diabetes die of some form of heart or blood vessel disease.

What are the Symptoms of a Heart Attack?

While the most common symptom of a heart attack (in both women and men) is crushing chest pain, women also experience lesser typical symptoms such as:

- Pain in the jaw or shoulder
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Weakness or fatigue

Take these symptoms seriously. If you think you may be having a heart attack, **call 9-1-1 immediately.**

Chew an uncoated aspirin right away, at the first sign of chest discomfort or distress. It can reduce the damage to the heart muscle during a heart attack.