

HEART DISEASE RISK FACTORS



Almost half of all Americans have at least one of the three key risk factors for heart disease. The key risk factors for heart disease include: high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking. It's important to know how these can increase your likelihood of getting heart disease, and the steps you can take to lower your risk.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure occurs when the pressure of the blood in your arteries and other blood vessels is too high. The high pressure can affect your heart and other organs. Changes in lifestyle, such as lowering sodium in the diet and engaging in regular exercise, can help to lower blood pressure.

High Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a substance made by the liver and found in certain foods. The liver makes all the cholesterol we need, but often people will eat more cholesterol than the body can use. The extra cholesterol can build up in the arteries causing a decrease in blood flow to the heart, brain, kidneys and other parts of the body. Eating a diet low in saturated, or “unhealthy” fats, and exercising regularly can help to lower blood cholesterol.

Smoking

Cigarette smoking can damage the heart and blood vessels, which increase the risk for heart conditions and heart attack. Nicotine itself raises blood pressure as well. If you smoke, talk with your doctor about ways to help you quit smoking.

¹Fryar CD, Chen T, Li X. Prevalence of Uncontrolled Risk Factors for Cardiovascular Disease: United States, 1999–2010.

NCHS Data Brief, No. 103. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Dept of Health and Human Services; 2012.