



HAPPY VALENTINES!

HEART HEALTH

More than 58 million Americans have one or more types of cardiovascular disease and many more are at risk for developing it. As our understanding of heart disease grows, so does our comprehension of risk factors. There are major risk factors which research has shown are definitely associated with increases in heart disease such as increasing age, heredity, smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and physical inactivity. Men and postmenopausal women are at greater risk. There are also contributing risk factors, which are less precisely understood such as stress, obesity and socioeconomic status. The more risk factors a person has, the greater the chance he or she will develop cardiovascular disease. A great reference site is www.health-heart.org

What are the major risk factors that can't be changed?

Heredity (including race) - Children of parents with cardiovascular disease are more likely to develop it themselves. African-Americans have more severe hypertension than whites. Consequently, their risk of heart disease is greater.

Gender - Men have a greater risk of heart attack than premenopausal women, and have attacks earlier in life.

Increasing age - About four out of five people who die of a heart attack are over 65. At older ages, women are twice as likely as men to die within a few weeks of a heart attack.

What are some of the signs and symptoms?

Chest pressure, discomfort, or a bandlike sensation around the chest with squeezing or heaviness is a common symptom of heart attack.

- About one fourth of people having a heart attack have no pain ("silent" heart attack). Silent heart attacks are more frequent in people with diabetes.

The following symptoms suggest a heart attack:

- Chest pain or pressure (heaviness)
- Jaw pain, or extension of pain into the arms or shoulder
- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Unexplained sweating
- Heartburn or feeling of indigestion
- Nausea or vomiting
- Back pain or upper abdominal pain
- General lethargy or listlessness (malaise)

Heart attack prevention depends on monitoring and modifying certain risk factors. These risk factors are interrelated. Each of us may have one or more risk factors. If we make moderate change in one area of life, we may reduce other risk factors at the same time.

What risk factors can be changed?

Cigarette/tobacco smoke - Cigarette smoking is the biggest risk factor for sudden cardiac death. Smokers' risk of heart attack is more than twice that of nonsmokers.

High blood cholesterol levels - The risk of coronary artery disease rises as blood cholesterol levels increase. When other risk factors (such as high blood pressure and cigarette smoke) are present, this risk increases even more.

High blood pressure – High blood pressure increases the heart's workload, causing it to enlarge and weaken over time. It also increases the risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney failure and congestive heart failure. When someone with high blood pressure is overweight, smokes, has high blood cholesterol levels or diabetes, the risk of heart attack increases several times.

Physical inactivity - Even modest levels of low-intensity physical activity are beneficial if done regularly and long term. Exercise can help control blood cholesterol, diabetes and obesity as well as help to lower blood pressure.

Obesity - People with an excessive amount of body fat are more likely to develop heart disease even if they have no other risk factors. Excess weight increases the strain on the heart; it influences blood pressure and cholesterol, and can lead to diabetes.

Stress - Scientists have noted a relationship between coronary heart disease and chronic stress.

Substance abuse - People with a history of substance abuse, particularly cocaine and alcohol abuse place themselves at risk for heart disease.

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