



Heart Disease

Heart disease is a common term for coronary artery disease. It is the number one cause of death in both men and women in the United States.

Causes

Heart disease is caused by atherosclerosis—a buildup of plaque in the inner walls of the arteries—which narrows, slows, or blocks the flow of blood to the heart.

Risk Factors

Controllable risk factors for heart disease include the following:

- High blood pressure
- High LDL cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes
- Smoking
- Being overweight or obese
- Lack of physical activity
- Using illegal drugs, such as cocaine

Warning Signs

The symptoms you experience depend on the type and severity of your heart condition. Common signs and symptoms of heart disease include the following:

- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Heart palpitations
- Weakness or fatigue

Call your doctor if you begin to have new symptoms or if they become more frequent or severe.

Treatment

The goals of treatment for heart disease are to relieve symptoms, control or reduce risk factors, stop or slow further damage to the arteries, and prevent and treat cardiac events. Treatment includes several options:

- Self-care and prevention
- Medications
- Procedures to open blocked or narrowed arteries or to bypass them
- Cardiac rehabilitation

Self-care and Prevention

You can follow a healthy lifestyle to help prevent heart disease:

- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Don't smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- If you are at a higher risk for heart disease, ask your doctor about low-dose aspirin therapy.
- Watch for signs of diabetes and see your doctor if you have any symptoms.
- Follow a diet low in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol.
- Limit sodium intake to 1,500 to 2,400 milligrams per day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Manage stress by practicing relaxation techniques.
- Drink alcohol in moderation. Check with your doctor to find out if and how much you should drink.