

Health Net of California, Inc. (Health Net)
Health Net Community Solutions, Inc.



Your Heart's Health is Key to a Healthy Life

WHAT TO KNOW TO KEEP YOUR HEART HEALTHY



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Embracing a healthy lifestyle at any age can prevent heart disease and lower your risk for a heart attack or stroke. Your heart health is central to overall good health. You are never too old or too young to begin taking care of your heart!

What to Know About Heart Health?



Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are a group of heart and blood vessel disorders that are the leading cause of death worldwide.² They include:

- **Coronary heart disease.** A disease of the blood vessels that supply the heart muscle.
- **Cerebrovascular disease.** A disease of the blood vessels that supply the brain.
- **Peripheral arterial disease.** A disease of blood vessels that supply the arms and legs.
- **Rheumatic heart disease.** Damage to the heart muscle and heart valves from rheumatic fever.
- **Congenital heart disease.** Birth defects that affect the normal growth and function of the heart.
- **Deep vein thrombosis.** Blood clots in the leg veins, which can break loose and move to the heart and lungs.



Common Questions About Heart Health



What is heart disease?³

The term “heart disease” refers to several types of heart conditions. The most common type of heart disease in the United States is [coronary artery disease](#) (CAD). CAD affects the blood flow to the heart. Reduced blood flow can cause a [heart attack](#).

Another form of heart disease is heart failure. It is a chronic condition that evolves over time. Heart failure happens when the heart muscle can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs for blood and oxygen.

What are the symptoms of heart disease?

Sometimes heart disease may be “silent” and not found until a person has signs or symptoms³ of:

- A [heart attack](#):
 - Chest pain or tightness
 - Upper back or neck pain
 - Upset stomach
 - Heartburn
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Extreme fatigue
 - Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Arrhythmia: Fluttering feelings in the chest
- [Heart failure](#):
 - Shortness of breath
 - Fatigue
 - Swelling of the feet, ankles, legs, stomach, or neck veins

Nearly **697,000** people in the United States died from heart disease in 2020 – that's **1 in every 5 deaths**.^{3,4}





Heart attack and stroke

Heart attacks and strokes are often severe events. They are mainly caused by a blockage that prevents blood from flowing to a part of the heart or brain. This is mainly due to a buildup of fatty tissue on the inner walls of the blood vessels that supply the heart or brain. Strokes can be caused by bleeding from a blood vessel in the brain or from blood clots.



What are the risk factors?

Heart disease risk factors include high [blood pressure](#), high blood [cholesterol](#) and damage from [smoking](#). About half of people in the United States (47%) have at least one of these three risk factors.³ Several other medical conditions and lifestyle choices can also put people at a higher risk for heart disease. These include:

- [Diabetes](#)
- [Little or no exercise](#)
- [Overweight and obesity](#)
- [Too much alcohol use](#)
- Poor diet

Learn how [heart disease and mental health disorders are linked](#).



What is cardiac rehabilitation (rehab)?

[Cardiac rehab](#) is an important program for those healing from:

- Heart attack
- Heart failure
- Some types of heart surgery

It's a managed program that includes:

- Exercise
- Education about healthy living, that including:
 - Healthy eating
 - Medicine
 - Smoking cessation
- Behavioral health counseling

A team of people may help you through cardiac rehab and can include:

- Your health care team
- Exercise and nutrition specialists
- Physical therapists
- Mental health experts

What Health Conditions Increase the Risk Of Heart Disease?



High blood pressure. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease. It happens when the pressure of the blood in your arteries and other blood vessels is too high. The high pressure, if not controlled, can affect your heart and other major organs that include your kidneys and brain.

You can lower your blood pressure with lifestyle changes or with medicine to reduce your risk for heart disease and heart attack. [Learn more about blood pressure.](#)

High blood pressure is often called a “silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms. The only way to know whether you have high blood pressure is to measure your blood pressure.





[High blood cholesterol levels](#). Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by the liver or found in certain foods. Your liver makes enough cholesterol for your body's needs. But, we often get more cholesterol from the foods we eat.

If you take in more cholesterol than the body can use, the extra cholesterol can build up in the walls of your arteries, including those of your heart. This can lead to your veins getting narrow and can decrease the blood flow to your heart, brain, kidneys and other parts of the body.

[There are two main types of blood cholesterol](#): LDL (low-density lipoprotein) cholesterol and HDL (high-density lipoprotein) cholesterol.



LDL is thought to be “**bad**” cholesterol because it can cause plaque buildup in your arteries.



HDL is thought to be “**good**” cholesterol because higher levels provide some defense against heart disease.



Get checked out

High blood cholesterol usually has no signs or symptoms. The only way to know whether you have high cholesterol is to get your cholesterol checked. Your health care team can do a simple blood test, called a “lipid profile,” to measure your cholesterol levels. Learn more about [getting your cholesterol checked](#).

[Diabetes](#). Your body needs insulin to move glucose (sugar) from the food you eat to your body’s cells for energy. If you have diabetes, your body doesn’t make enough insulin. Or, your body can’t use its own insulin as well as it should.

Diabetes causes sugar to build up in the blood. The risk of death from heart disease for adults with diabetes is higher than for adults who do not have diabetes.² Talk with your doctor about ways to prevent or [manage diabetes](#) and control other risk factors.

[Obesity](#). Obesity is excess body fat. It’s linked to higher “bad” cholesterol and triglyceride levels. And, it’s linked to lower “good” cholesterol levels. Obesity can lead to high blood pressure and diabetes as well as heart disease. Talk with your health care team about a plan to reduce your weight to a healthy level. Learn more about [healthy weight](#).



About **half of all Americans (47%)** have at least 1 of 3 key risk factors for heart disease: high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking.³





What can increase the risk of heart disease?

Your lifestyle can increase your risk for heart disease.

- Eating a diet high in saturated fats, trans fat, and cholesterol has been linked to heart disease and other conditions. Also, too much [salt](#) (sodium) in the diet can raise blood pressure.
- Not getting enough [exercise](#) can lead to heart disease. It can also increase your chance of having other medical conditions that are risk factors, including:
 - Obesity
 - High cholesterol
 - High blood pressure
 - Diabetes



Regular exercise can lower your risk for heart disease.

Drinking too much [alcohol](#) can raise blood pressure levels and the risk for heart disease. It also raises levels of triglycerides, a fatty substance in the blood which can increase the risk for heart disease.

- Women should have no more than one drink a day.
- Men should have no more than two drinks a day.
- [Tobacco use](#) can also boost the risk for heart disease and heart attack:
 - Cigarette smoking can damage the heart and blood vessels, which can raise your risk for heart disease and heart attack.
 - Nicotine raises blood pressure.
 - Chemicals from cigarette smoke reduce the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry.
 - Being exposed to secondhand smoke can also raise the risk for heart disease, even for people who don't smoke.



How does family history affect the risk of heart disease?

Genetic factors likely play some role in high blood pressure, heart disease and other conditions. But it is also likely that families with a history of heart disease can share common settings and other factors that may increase their risk.

The risk for heart disease can increase even more when a family's health history combines with poor lifestyle choices. For instance, smoking cigarettes and eating unhealthy foods.

Find out more about family history and disease on [CDC's Office of Public Health Genomics website](#).

Do age and sex affect the risk of heart disease?

Heart disease is the number one killer of humans. It can happen at any age, but the risk goes up as you age.

Do race and ethnic background affect the risk of heart disease?

Heart disease and stroke can affect anyone. But, there are some racial and ethnic groups that are more likely to have a greater risk for heart disease.

Heart disease is the **leading cause of death** for people of most racial and ethnic groups in the United States. These include:

- African Americans
- Alaska natives
- American Indians
- White Americans

Plus, heart disease is second only to cancer in cause of death for:

- Asian Americans
- Pacific islanders
- Hispanics⁴



Take charge

If you have high cholesterol, high blood pressure or diabetes, you can take steps to lower your risk for heart disease.

- Check your cholesterol
- Control your blood pressure
- Manage your diabetes
- Take your medicines as directed
- Work with your health care team as needed



You Can Help Prevent Heart Disease



Don't forget! You can choose healthy habits to help prevent heart disease that include:

- Healthy foods and drinks
- Regular exercise
- Keeping a healthy weight
- Not smoking

By living a healthy lifestyle, you can help keep your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels normal. At the same time, you can lower your risk for heart disease and heart attack.

As always, it is important to work with your doctor regularly and make sure to see them for routine checkups.



Find Out More

Call Health Net's Health Education Information Line
Toll free **800-804-6074 (TTY:711)**
Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific time.

¹Phelps Memorial. [Love Your Heart: Know the Importance of Your Heart's Health](#). February 16, 2021.

²World Health Organization. [Cardiovascular Diseases](#). Accessed February 7, 2023.

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. [About Multiple Cause of Death, 1999–2020](#). CDC WONDER Online Database website. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2022. Accessed February 7, 2023.

⁴Fryar CD, Chen T-C, 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; 2012. Accessed February 7, 2023.

Resource: <https://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/about.htm>

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Please always follow your health care provider's instructions.

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