

Risk Factors for Heart Disease

Heat disease kills more Americans each year than any other disease or illness. It is important to understand what makes heart disease so common and how you can reduce your chances of having heart disease. Heart disease can be **silent** (no symptoms) in some persons. They may not be aware of heart disease until they have a heart attack (also known as a **myocardial infarction**). More than 2600 Americans die every day from **cardiovascular** (heart and blood vessel) disease.

The August 20, 2003, issue of *JAMA* includes several articles about risk factors for heart disease. A **risk factor** is something that makes you more likely to have a disease, illness, or medical problem. Some risk factors are **modifiable** (can be made better). Other risk factors, such as age and **genetics** (family history), cannot be changed.

RISK FACTORS FOR HEART DISEASE

MODIFIABLE

- Smoking or exposure to environmental tobacco smoke
- Obesity
- Sedentary lifestyle (not enough physical activity)
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol or abnormal blood lipids (fats)
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)

NONMODIFIABLE

- Male sex
- Age older than 50 years
- Family history of heart disease

REDUCE YOUR CARDIAC RISK

- Stop smoking.
- Eat a low-fat diet rich in vegetables and fruits.
- Exercise daily for at least 30 minutes.
- Control diabetes and hypertension if you already have these medical problems.
- Manage your cholesterol and blood lipid levels if they are elevated.
- Know your family history, especially about heart attacks or sudden death at age younger than 50 years.

See your doctor regularly to assess heart risks, manage heart disease if it is already present, and reduce your risk of heart attack or sudden death.



Sources: American Heart Association; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; American College of Cardiology

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Heart Association
888/694-3278
www.americanheart.org
- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
301/592-8573
www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
888/246-2675
www.cdc.gov
- National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease
202/728-7199
www.womenheart.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on *JAMA*'s Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on heart disease and women was published in the December 25, 2002, issue; one on obesity and weight loss was published in the April 9, 2003, issue; and one on smoking and the heart was published in the July 2, 2003, issue.

