

# Heart Disease

## Fact Sheet

### What is heart disease?

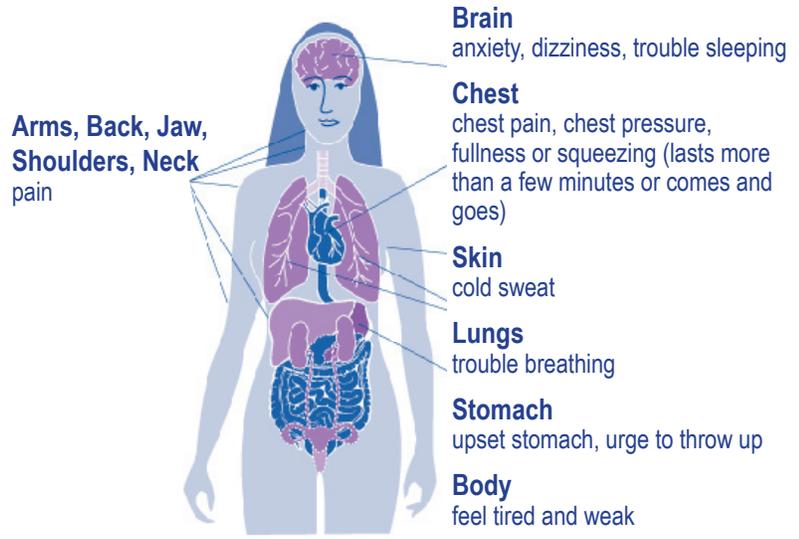
Heart disease is a term that includes several heart conditions. The most common heart disease in the United States is coronary heart disease, which often appears as a heart attack. Your heart muscle needs oxygen to survive. Blood with oxygen is carried to the heart muscle in blood vessels called coronary arteries. A buildup of fat and cholesterol, called plaque, can occur in the blood vessels. If plaque breaks, a blood clot forms. The blood clot can block the artery and shut off the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart muscle. A heart attack occurs when the heart muscle starves from lack of blood flow and dies. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women.

Heart disease takes many years to develop, and there are often no signs until a heart attack occurs. The most common symptom of a heart attack is chest pain or an intense pressure or squeezing in the chest that lasts more than a few minutes.

Other symptoms are:

- ◆ discomfort or pain in the upper parts of the body, such as the arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach
- ◆ breathing problems
- ◆ being sick to your stomach or nauseous

### Signs of a Heart Attack



- ◆ feeling faint or woozy
- ◆ breaking out in a cold sweat.

### What are the risk factors for heart disease?

Heart disease is usually caused by a number of factors. The more risk factors one has, the greater the chance for disease. Some risk factors cannot be changed or controlled, while other risk factors are controllable.

#### ◆ Risk factors you can control:

- Smoking
- Drinking more than 1 alcoholic drink a day
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Diet high in fat, calories and cholesterol

# Heart Disease

High blood pressure of 140/90 or above

Stress

◆ **Risk factors you cannot control:**

Family history

Women over 65 and men over 50

## **How can I lower my risk for heart disease?**

- ◆ Know your family history and talk to your healthcare provider about screening tests for heart disease. Ask about what you can do to prevent heart disease.
- ◆ Stop smoking and do not drink more than 1 alcoholic drink a day.
- ◆ Keep a healthy weight by eating a



well balanced diet. Include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean meats in your diet.

- ◆ Cut back on foods high in cholesterol and salt. Try to eat less than 300 mg of cholesterol each day and 2,300 mg of salt each day.
- ◆ Get at least 30 minutes of exercise every day.
- ◆ Do not drink more than 1 alcoholic drink a day.
- ◆ Get your blood pressure checked regularly.
- ◆ Manage stress in a healthy way.

\*Don't wait for symptoms. Talk to your healthcare provider about your family health history. Find out what you can do to reduce your risk of disease or detect it early.\*

## **For more information about heart disease:**

- ◆ American Health Association  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)
- ◆ American Heart Association's Go Red for Women  
[www.goredforwomen.org](http://www.goredforwomen.org)
- ◆ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/](http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/)