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Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at Moreton & Company.

# Heart Disease

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

## Types

With heart disease, arteries that supply the blood to the heart become hardened and narrowed. Heart disease can lead to the following problems:

- **Angina** – The heart muscle doesn't get as much blood and oxygen as it needs. Angina doesn't damage the heart muscle (like a heart attack would), but is a warning sign that a heart attack could occur.
- **Heart Attack** – The heart doesn't get enough blood supply for a period of time and part, or all, of the heart muscle dies.



- **Heart Failure** – The heart fails to supply the body with enough blood and oxygen. This develops slowly over time, and becomes chronic.

## Causes

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

## Risk Factors

There are both controllable and uncontrollable risk factors for heart disease. For instance, you cannot control:

- Having a past heart attack or stroke
- A family history of heart disease
- Being a male 45 years or older
- Being a female 55 years or older

You can, however, control these risk factors:

- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Smoking
- Being overweight or obese
- Lack of physical activity
- Having type 2 diabetes and high blood cholesterol
- Using cocaine or amphetamines
- Metabolic syndrome

There are even more factors that can play a role in the development of heart disease, so you should make sure you are routinely tested for the following risks:

- Waist measurement of 40 inches or more for men; 35 inches or more for women.
- Elevated CRP in the blood (C-reactive protein)
- Elevated blood homocysteine levels
- Elevated blood lipoprotein A
- Elevated blood triglycerides
- Infections, like chlamydial pneumonia

### Treatment

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

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

### Self-Care/Prevention

- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Make sure your doctor checks your blood pressure at each visit or at least every 2 years.
- Make sure your blood cholesterol gets checked at least every five years.
- Don't smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Take all medications as prescribed (that also means making sure you take them!)

- Ask your doctor about taking a low-dose of aspirin daily to help prevent heart disease.
- Watch for signs of diabetes and see your doctor if you have any.
- Follow a diet low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol. Limit sodium intake to 1,500 to 2,400 milligrams per day.
- Get regular exercise.
- Manage stress by practicing relaxation techniques.
- Drink in moderation (no more than 2 drinks per day for men; 1 drink per day for women and people older than age 65.) Check with your doctor to find out if and how much you can drink.
- Get your doctor's advice about taking vitamins, minerals and other supplements or herbal products.

### Warning Signs

Most people are aware of the signs and symptoms of a heart attack, but the chances someone would recognize the warning signs of the other types of heart disease – angina and heart failure – is less likely because they happen more slowly, over time:

- **Angina** – Pain, discomfort or a squeezing pressure in chest; aching tooth, jaw or neck; symptoms go away with rest; may occur with anger, excitement or exertion.
- **Heart Failure** – Shortness of breath; extreme tiredness and weakness; swelling in the lower legs, ankles or feet; dry cough or cough with pink, frothy mucus; rapid weight gain; rapid heartbeat.

## Did you know...?

As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

*Source: American Heart Association*