

February is American Heart Month, sponsored by the American Heart Association, so it's a great time to review what you can do to keep your heart healthy. Many of the risk factors for heart disease and stroke are ones that can be treated, modified or controlled through lifestyle changes or medication. The more risk factors you have, the greater your chances of developing heart disease. Here's a look at some risk factors you can control:

Smoking

Smokers are two to four times more likely to develop coronary heart disease than nonsmokers. Smokers with coronary heart disease have about twice the risk of nonsmokers for sudden cardiac death. Exposure to secondhand smoke increases the risk of heart disease for nonsmokers as well.

High Blood Cholesterol

High blood cholesterol levels raise the risk for coronary heart disease. Age, sex, heredity and diet affect cholesterol levels.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure makes the heart work harder, which causes it to thicken and become stiffer. This causes the heart to not work properly, increasing your risk of stroke, heart attack, kidney failure and congestive heart failure.

Physical Inactivity

A sedentary lifestyle is a risk factor for coronary heart disease. Regular physical activity can help control blood cholesterol, diabetes and obesity, as well as help lower blood pressure.

Obesity and Overweight

People with excess body fat are more likely to develop heart disease and stroke even if they have no other risk factors. Excess weight makes the heart work harder, raises blood pressure and cholesterol levels, and raised the risk for diabetes.

Diabetes mellitus

Diabetes seriously increases heart disease and stroke risk, even when glucose levels are under control. The risks are even greater if blood sugar is not well controlled.

Alcohol

Drinking too much raises blood pressure, and can cause heart failure and lead to stroke.

Diet and Nutrition

Choosing to eat a healthy diet is one of the best things you can do to keep your heart healthy. Stick with a diet that emphasizes vegetables, fruits, whole-grain and high-fiber foods, fish, lean protein and fat-free or low-fat dairy products.



Stress

How you handle stress may affect your risk for heart disease. Some people under stress overeat, or smoke or drink more—all behaviors that raise your risk.

Get resources and support for making lifestyle changes to keep your heart healthy by contacting GuidanceResources®.

Additional Information

This information is brought to you by ComPsych® GuidanceResources®. This company-sponsored benefit offers confidential help and support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at no cost to you or your immediate family. Our Guidance Consultants can assist you with your concerns at: **877-627-4239**

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