Heart Disease

Heart disease is a common term for coronary artery disease. It is the number one cause of death in both men and women over the age of 60 in the United States.

Causes
Heart disease is caused by atherosclerosis – a buildup of plaque in the inner walls of the arteries – which narrows, slows or blocks the flow of blood to the heart.

Risk Factors
Controllable risk factors for heart disease include:
- High blood pressure
- High LDL cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes
- Smoking
- Being overweight or obese
- Lack of physical activity
- Using illegal drugs, such as cocaine or speed

Warning Signs
The symptoms you experience depend on the type and severity of your heart condition. Common signs and symptoms of heart disease include:
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Chest pain or discomfort

Call your doctor if you begin to have new symptoms or if they become more frequent or severe.

Treatment
The goals of treatment for heart disease are to relieve symptoms, control or reduce risk factors, stop or slow further damage to the arteries and prevent and treat cardiac events. Treatment includes:
- Self-care and prevention
- Medications
- Procedures to open blocked or narrowed arteries or to bypass them
- Cardiac rehabilitation

Self-Care and Prevention
- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Don’t smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- If you are at a higher risk for heart disease, ask your doctor about low-dose aspirin therapy.
- Watch for signs of diabetes and see your doctor if you have any symptoms.
- Follow a diet low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol.
- Limit sodium intake to 1,500 to 2,400 milligrams per day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Manage stress by practicing relaxation techniques.
- Drink alcohol in moderation. Check with your doctor to find out if and how much you may drink.

Did You Know...?
The most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting and back or jaw pain.
CHOLESTEROL AND YOUR HEART HEALTH

If you know the number of your total cholesterol, that’s good. But is it good enough?

What’s in a Number

In the past, doctors thought that total cholesterol was a good indicator of one’s risk for heart disease, heart attack, diabetes and stroke. The lower your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) numbers and the higher your high-density lipoprotein (HDL) numbers, the better, right? While measuring HDL, LDL and total cholesterol is helpful, experts now know that to truly assess your risk for heart attack, heart disease and stroke, it’s not as simple as just knowing these numbers.

The Lipoprotein Link

Research indicates that no matter how much cholesterol you inherit or take in when you eat, the blockage of arteries that leads to heart disease is caused by the number and size of the lipoprotein particles that carry cholesterol throughout your body. These lipoprotein particles can build up in your arteries. Think of it this way: These lipoproteins are the cars that carry passengers (cholesterol) along the highway—it’s not the number of “passengers” in a car that causes a traffic jam (blocked artery), it’s the number of cars!

Your Particle Number

The number and particle size of lipoproteins in your blood are the measurements than can really help your doctor determine your risk for heart attack, heart disease and stroke. A screening test called an NMR LipoProfile® is available, which provides a more detailed look at how your particles measure up. The number of LDL particles circulating in your blood is the most important factor in measuring your heart health. It is important to know how many there are and how big they are. Generally, the lower your number of total LDL particles, and the larger the size of these particles, the lower your risk is for heart disease, heart attack and stroke.

Getting Tested

Currently, most patients and many doctors are not even aware that a simple blood test exists than can analyze your cholesterol numbers in such detail. Those who do, however, realize that it is a valuable tool necessary for early prediction, prevention and treatment of heart attack, heart disease and stroke. If you have a family history or other risk factors for heart attack, heart disease and stroke, or have already been diagnosed with high cholesterol (even if you are already being treated for it), ask your doctor about having an NMR LipoProfile test. It is currently covered by many private insurance carriers, although different rates and coverage do apply. If your insurance doesn’t cover it, consider having it done anyway. The test is relatively inexpensive, and the results you get are important for your health.
Daily Aspirin Therapy for Heart Health

Heart disease is a concern for many Americans and is the leading killer of women in the U.S. Along with a healthy diet and exercise, those at risk of a heart attack or stroke can take another precaution to reduce their risks – a daily dose of aspirin.

According to the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, taking an aspirin daily can actually lower the risk of heart attack and stroke, as it interferes with the body’s blood clotting action.

As blood clots within the vessels that supply blood to your heart and brain, it can block arteries that are already narrowed due to the buildup of fatty deposits. When this occurs, blood cannot flow to the heart and brain successfully, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke. However, by taking aspirin on a regular basis, you can reduce clotting and potentially prevent a heart attack or stroke.

Is Aspirin Therapy Right for Me?
Taking a daily dose of aspirin is not right for everyone and it is ultimately up to you and your doctor to determine if this therapy will benefit your current health condition. Those who will typically benefit from daily aspirin therapy are:

- Smokers
- Those with high blood pressure
- People with a total cholesterol level of 240 mg/dL or higher
- Those with a low-density lipoprotein (“bad” cholesterol) level of 130 mg/dL or higher
- Those who lack regular physical activity
- Diabetics
- People experiencing lots of stress
- Men who consume more than two alcoholic drinks per day or women who consume more than one alcoholic drink per day
- People with a family history of heart attack or stroke

Though you may be afflicted with some of these risk factors, daily aspirin therapy may not be for you if you have any of these conditions:

- Suffering from a bleeding or clotting disorder
- Asthma
- Stomach ulcers
- Heart failure
- Taking certain medications that may increase your chance of bleeding

Dosage
There is no uniform aspirin dosage that suits all patients with heart disease risk factors. Some patients benefit from 75 mg, which is less than one baby aspirin, while others benefit from 325 mg, or the potency of one regular aspirin.

Side Effects
There are several side effects of taking daily aspirin therapy that you should discuss with your doctor before beginning this regime. They include:

- Hemorrhagic stroke (bleeding stroke)
- Gastrointestinal bleeding (development of a stomach ulcer)
- Allergic reaction
- Ringing in the ears and hearing loss
- Negative interactions with alcohol

Talk with your doctor about this inexpensive, readily available preventive treatment for heart disease to determine if it is right for you.

Did You Know...?
Abruptly stopping daily aspirin therapy can actually have adverse effects on your health and may cause blood clots to form. Before stopping this preventive treatment, talk with your doctor about how to do so safely.

This brochure is for informational purposes only and is not intended as medical advice. For further information, please consult a medical professional.
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