

Understanding Heart Disease

What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is a general term for different heart problems. The most common cause of heart disease is a narrowing of the tubes that carry blood to the heart. This is called **coronary artery disease** and happens slowly over time. It's the main reason people have heart attacks.

Other kinds of heart problems include:

- **Congestive heart failure** is when the heart isn't strong enough to pump enough blood through the body.
- **Angina** is chest pain when the heart isn't getting enough blood.
- **High blood pressure** is when the force blood puts on artery walls as it moves through the body is too high. High blood pressure is both a type of heart disease and a risk factor for other problems.



Controlling Risk Factors

There are things that put you at risk for heart disease. Some of these things you can't control, such as your age and family history. Other things you can control. These things include:

Smoking. Smoking puts stress on the heart and can raise blood pressure. There is no safe way to smoke. Quitting is one of the best things you can do for your heart health.

High blood pressure. High blood pressure raises the risks of stroke, congestive heart failure, and kidney disease. You can lower your blood pressure by taking medication and making lifestyle changes such as eating less sodium (salt) and exercising.

High cholesterol. Cholesterol is a waxy substance that travels in your blood. If cholesterol is too high it can start to build up on artery walls. Medication and lifestyle changes such as eating less high fat foods and more fruits and vegetables help to lower cholesterol.

Lack of exercise. As little as 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week helps to protect heart health. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

Overweight and obesity. Even losing a little weight can help improve your health.

For information in your language or in another format, call L.A.
Care at **1-888-839-9909** or TTY/TDD **711**