

Love your heart



Heart disease is the number one world-wide killer. Heart disease mainly affects people over the age of 50, but this does not mean the process starts at an older age. If you were in a position to protect yourself from heart disease 10 or so years from now, would you do so?

Heart disease is when the blood vessels thicken and harden. This causes them to narrow and reduces the amount of blood that can flow through them. When blood vessels supplying the heart muscle are affected, a heart attack or angina (severe chest pain) may result. The following factors contribute to heart disease:

1. Elevated cholesterol

Cholesterol is a type of fat found in the blood. There are several different types of fat in the blood. Some fat gets deposited in blood vessel walls and this leads to, or worsens, the blood vessels thickening. High cholesterol can be caused by genetic (hereditary) predisposition, a diet high in fat, diabetes or obesity.

2. Lack of exercise

Without regular physical activity, the heart muscle is not protected from blood vessel thickening and hardening. Those who develop good health habits in early life are more likely to continue these habits throughout their life. Aerobic exercise for 30 to 60 minutes on most days of the week should be encouraged to reduce the risk of heart disease.

3. Obesity

Obesity predisposes individuals to heart disease through an increased risk of diabetes and elevated cholesterol. Fat deposited on the abdomen is particularly harmful.

4. Diabetes mellitus

This is a condition in which blood sugar cannot be absorbed and used by the body cells. Usually, this condition is caused by a lack of insulin (the hormone responsible for sugar control) but there is an increasing number of people who develop diabetes due to diet- and lifestyle-related insulin resistance (where there is enough insulin but the body cannot respond to it). Diabetes and

even pre-diabetes increase the risk of heart disease by 3 to 4 times.

How can you protect your heart?

Most of the risk factors for heart disease are lifestyle factors. This means that with healthy interventions as early as possible, there is more chance of you reducing your risk of heart disease.

• Exercise

Incorporate exercise as a part of your life. Enjoyment is key if you want to continue exercising throughout your life so find some form of physical activity that you enjoy, be it swimming at a local pool, or simply taking your dog for a walk. Adults should engage in moderate level physical activities for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.

• Healthy diet

Along with healthy weight and regular physical activity, an overall healthy diet can help to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels and prevent obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. This includes eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, lowering or cutting out added salt or sodium, and eating less saturated fat and cholesterol to lower these risks.

• Stop smoking

Nicotine in tobacco smoke can increase blood pressure causing the heart to work harder and the carbon monoxide replaces the oxygen in your blood. Smoking adds to the obstruction of the arteries which can lead to heart attacks and other heart-related conditions. A person's risk of heart attack decreases soon after quitting.

• Moderate alcohol use

Excessive alcohol use increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. People who drink should do so only in moderation and always responsibly.



Member of the Global  Group

