



Disease Management: Heart Disease

What Is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. The most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease, which is the blockage of blood vessels leading to the heart and the main reason for heart attacks.

Symptoms

Most heart attacks are not sudden or painful. They actually begin slowly with mild discomfort or pain. So, many people wait too long before seeking medical care.

Here are some signs to watch for:

- Discomfort in the chest or other areas of the upper body—arm(s), neck, back, stomach, or jaw—that lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back
- Shortness of breath, with or without chest pain or discomfort
- Breaking out in a sweat, lightheadedness, or nausea

If you think you are having a heart attack, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Treatment

Early treatment can reduce damage to the heart muscle. Treatment may include the following:

- Oxygen
- Aspirin, to help prevent blood clotting
- Nitroglycerin, to improve blood flow through the arteries

As soon as the diagnosis of a heart attack is confirmed, treatments to restore blood flow to the heart, including medicines and medical procedures, are started.

Prevention

Help reduce your risk of heart disease by adopting better lifestyle habits:

- Eat healthful foods that are low in fat and cholesterol (find heart-healthy recipes at www.americanheart.org/deliciousdecisions)
- Manage your weight
- Increase your physical activity
- Stop smoking
- Limit alcohol consumption

Online Resources

For more information on heart disease symptoms, treatment and prevention, search these useful Web sites:

- American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org
- WebMD
www.webmd.com
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/heartdisease
- United States National Library of Medicine (National Institutes of Health)
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus
(search for *heart disease*)