



# Understanding Heart Disease

## Did You Know?

Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the United States.

Although most people survive their first heart attack, lifestyle changes may be necessary to prevent future heart attacks.

Despite being a preventable disease, heart disease continues to be the leading cause of death in the United States. **Heart disease** is a broad term that describes a range of conditions that affect the heart. Also called **cardiovascular disease** or **coronary heart disease**, heart disease generally refers to conditions that relate to plaque buildup in the artery walls. When plaque builds up in artery walls, it is called **atherosclerosis**, and it causes narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries. Narrowing of the arteries can lead to **hypertension**, otherwise known as high blood pressure, making it difficult for blood to flow to the heart and leading to symptoms such as:

- Chest pain (Angina)
- Heart Attack
- Stroke
- Shortness of Breath

## Causes of heart disease

There is no one cause of heart disease. Heart disease generally arises from the combination of various factors, such as smoking, lack of physically activity, poor diet, or genetics. Some risk factors for heart disease are avoidable such as poor diet and unhealthy weight, while others are not such as genetics and age. However, by avoiding the risk factors related to lifestyle, you can reduce your risk for heart disease overall.

## Decrease you risk for heart disease by avoiding these lifestyle-related risk factors:

**Smoking-** Using tobacco products increases the risk of heart disease by 2-4 times.

**Unhealthy diet-** A diet high in fat, salt, and cholesterol can contribute to the development of high blood pressure and ultimately, heart disease.

**Diabetes-** Having diabetes increases the risk of heart disease.

**Being Sedentary -** People who are not active and exercise fewer than three times a week are more likely to develop heart disease.

**Overweight or obesity-** People who have excess body fat are at a higher risk of developing heart disease, even if they have no other risk factors.

**High blood pressure or cholesterol levels-** As blood pressure and cholesterol levels rise, so does the risk of heart disease.

**Stress-** High levels of stress may increase the risk of developing heart disease.