

Living Well With Heart Disease



Heart Disease: A Wake-up Call

If you have heart disease, you may understandably hope that it's only a temporary ailment, one that can be cured with medicine or surgery. But heart disease is a lifelong condition: *Once you have it, you'll always have it.*

It's true that procedures such as angioplasty and bypass surgery can help blood and oxygen flow more easily through the coronary arteries that lead to the heart.

But the arteries remain damaged, which means that you're more likely to have a heart attack. It is sobering, yet important, to realize that the condition of your blood vessels will steadily worsen unless you make changes in your daily habits.

It is vital to take action to control this serious condition. The good news is that you can control heart disease. There is much you can do to manage your heart condition, reduce your risk of a first or repeat heart attack, and improve your chances of living a long, rewarding life.

The sooner you get started, the better your chances of avoiding further heart problems, feeling better, and staying well.

What Is Heart Disease?

Heart disease occurs when the coronary arteries, which supply blood to the heart muscle, become hardened and narrowed due to a buildup of plaque on the arteries'

inner walls. Plaque is the accumulation of cholesterol, fat, and other substances. As plaque continues to build up in the arteries, blood flow to the heart is reduced.

Heart disease can lead to a heart attack. A heart attack happens when a cholesterol-rich plaque bursts and releases its contents into the bloodstream. This causes a blood clot to form over the plaque, totally blocking flow through the artery and preventing vital oxygen

and nutrients from getting to the heart. A heart attack can cause permanent damage to the heart muscle.

Your Risk Factors

If you have heart disease, you may wonder *why* you have it. The answer is that many personal characteristics, health conditions, and lifestyle habits can contribute to heart disease. These are called risk factors.

But risk factors do more than simply contribute to heart problems. They also increase the chances that existing heart disease will worsen. It is very important to find out about all of your risk factors and take active steps to control them.

Major Risk Factors

A strong partnership with your doctor is an important first step in managing heart disease. But to make a lasting difference, you'll also need to learn more about the kinds of habits and conditions that can worsen heart disease



and what you can do about them. Major risk factors for heart disease, heart attack, and other heart problems are:

- ♥ Smoking
- ♥ High Blood Pressure
- ♥ High Blood Cholesterol
- ♥ Overweight and Obesity
- ♥ Physical Inactivity
- ♥ Diabetes

A number of other factors also contribute to heart disease, including certain health conditions, medicines and other substances:

- ♥ Stress
- ♥ Alcohol
- ♥ Sleep Apnea
- ♥ Menopausal Hormone Therapy
- ♥ C-Reactive Protein (CRP)

Making Lifestyle Changes

Making lifestyle changes that improve your risk factors is an important part of treatment. Eating well, getting regular physical activity, and maintaining a healthy weight will help to lessen the severity of your condition. If you smoke, you'll need to quit. Reducing stress and limiting alcohol use can also improve your heart health. And if you have diabetes, you will need to carefully manage it. Be sure to see your doctor regularly for follow-up visits. You also may need certain medications or special procedures. Talk to your doctor about any treatments and how each can help to protect your heart health.

Remember

Know the Warning Signs of a Heart Attack

Recognizing the warning signs and getting help quickly can save your life. Not all heart attacks begin with sudden, crushing pain. Many heart attacks start slowly with mild pain or discomfort. The most common warning signs are:

- ▮ Chest discomfort
- ▮ Discomfort in other areas of the upper body, including one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach
- ▮ Shortness of breath
- ▮ Other signs include nausea, light-headedness, or breaking out in a cold sweat

Get Help Quickly. CALL 9-1-1

If you think that you or someone else may be having a heart attack, you must act quickly. Emergency medical personnel can begin treatment even before you get to the hospital. Calling 9-1-1 quickly can save your life.

