

# Your Cardiovascular Health is Key to a Healthy Life

## WHAT TO KNOW TO KEEP YOUR HEART HEALTHY

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are a group of heart and blood vessel disorders that are the leading cause of death worldwide.<sup>1</sup> They include:

- **Coronary heart disease.** A disease of the blood vessels that supply the heart muscle.
- **Cerebrovascular disease.** A disease of the blood vessels that supply the brain.
- **Peripheral arterial disease.** A disease of blood vessels that supply the arms and legs.
- **Rheumatic heart disease.** Damage to the heart muscle and heart valves from rheumatic fever.
- **Congenital heart disease.** Birth defects that affect the normal growth and function of the heart.
- **Deep vein thrombosis.** Blood clots in the leg veins, which can break loose and move to the heart and lungs.

## What is heart disease?<sup>2</sup>

The term “heart disease” refers to several types of heart conditions. The most common type of heart disease in the United States is coronary artery disease (CAD). CAD affects the blood flow to the heart. Reduced blood flow can cause a heart attack.

Another form of heart disease is heart failure. It is a chronic condition that evolves over time. Heart failure happens when the heart muscle can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs for blood and oxygen.

## Heart attack and stroke

Heart attacks and strokes are often severe events. They are mainly caused by a blockage that prevents blood from flowing to the heart or brain. This is mainly due to a buildup of fatty tissue on the inner walls of the blood vessels that supply the heart or brain. Strokes also can be caused by bleeding from a blood vessel in the brain or from blood clots.

## What are the risk factors?

Heart disease risk factors include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and damage from smoking. About half of people in the United States (47%) have at least one of these three risk factors. Several other medical conditions and lifestyle choices can also put people at a higher risk for heart disease. These include: diabetes, obesity, poor diet, little to no exercise and too much alcohol use.



Nearly 697,000 people in the United States died from heart disease in 2020 – that's 1 in every 5 deaths.<sup>2,3</sup> Health Net has a Cardiac and Diabetes program; In 2022, we saw a 31% decrease in ER spend for members engaged in the Health Net programs.

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## What health conditions increase the risk of heart disease?

### **High Blood Pressure**

High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease. It happens when the pressure of the blood in your arteries and other blood vessels is too high. The high pressure, if not controlled, can affect your heart and other major organs that include your kidneys and brain.

You can lower your blood pressure with lifestyle changes or with medicine to reduce your risk for heart disease and heart attack.

### **High Blood Cholesterol Levels**

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by the liver or found in certain foods. Your liver makes enough cholesterol for your body's needs. But, we often get more cholesterol from the foods we eat.

If you take in more cholesterol than the body can use, the extra cholesterol can build up in the walls of your arteries, including those of your heart. This can lead to your arteries getting narrow and can decrease the blood flow to your heart, brain, kidneys and other parts of the body.

### **Take charge**

If you have high cholesterol, high blood pressure or diabetes, you can take steps to lower your risk for heart disease.

1. Check your cholesterol
2. Control your blood pressure
3. Manage your diabetes
4. Take your medicines as directed
5. Work with your health care team as needed

### **You can help prevent heart disease**

Don't forget! You can choose healthy habits to help prevent heart disease that include:

- Healthy foods and drinks
- Keeping a healthy weight
- Regular exercise
- Not smoking

By living a healthy lifestyle, you can help keep your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels normal. At the same time, you can lower your risk for heart disease and heart attack.



*High blood pressure is often called a "silent killer" because it usually has no symptoms. The only way to know whether you have high blood pressure is to measure your blood pressure.*

<sup>1</sup>World Health Organization. Cardiovascular Diseases. Accessed February 7, 2023.

<sup>2</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. About Multiple Cause of Death, 1999–2020. CDC WONDER Online Database website. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2022. Accessed February 7, 2023.

<sup>3</sup>Fryar CD, Chen T-C, Li X. Prevalence of uncontrolled risk factors for cardiovascular disease: United States, 1999–2010 pdf icon[PDF-494K]. NCHS data brief, no. 103. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2012. Accessed February 7, 2023.