

Heart Health



Leader Talking Points

- Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are disorders of the heart and blood vessels, which include coronary heart disease, heart attack, stroke, heart failure, arrhythmia, and more
- CVD is the leading cause of death worldwide—killing an estimated 17.9 million people annually
- Many CVDs are related to a condition called *atherosclerosis*, a condition in which plaque builds up in the walls of the arteries and thus narrows the arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through

HEART ATTACK

- When plaque within a heart artery breaks, a blood clot forms around the plaque; this blood clot can block the blood flow through the artery to the heart muscle
- A heart attack occurs when the blood flow that brings vital oxygen to the heart muscle is severely reduced or cut off completely
- Heart attack warning signs:
 - Chest discomfort
 - Discomfort in other areas of the upper body (arms, back, neck, jaw, or stomach)
 - Shortness of breath
 - Other signs such as breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness
 - NOTE: Symptoms vary between men and women – Women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort, but women are somewhat more likely than men to experience shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain
- **Don't wait to get help if you are experiencing heart attack warning signs – call 911!**

STROKE

- An *ischemic stroke* (the most common type of stroke) occurs when a blood vessel that feeds the brain gets blocked, usually from a blood clot
- A *hemorrhagic stroke* occurs when a blood vessel within the brain bursts – this is most often caused by uncontrolled hypertension (high blood pressure)
- When the blood supply to a part of the brain is cut off, some brain cells will begin to die – this can result in the loss of functions controlled by that part of the brain, such as walking or talking
- Stroke warning signs:
 - The three most common signs of stroke are face drooping, arm weakness, and speech difficulty
 - Other symptoms may include sudden numbness, confusion, trouble seeing, difficulty walking, or severe headache
- **Time is important, so don't delay – call 911 if someone shows any signs of stroke!**

HEART FAILURE

- Heart failure is a chronic, progressive condition in which the heart muscle is unable to pump enough blood to meet the body's needs for blood and oxygen
- With heart failure, the weakened heart can't supply the cells with enough blood, resulting in fatigue, shortness of breath, possible chronic cough, and making everyday tasks such as walking/climbing stairs very difficult
- Heart failure is a serious condition, and usually there's no cure; however, many people with heart failure lead a full, enjoyable life when their condition is managed with medication and healthy lifestyle changes

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ARRHYTHMIA

- *Arrhythmia* refers to an abnormal heart rhythm
- When the heart doesn't beat properly, it can't pump blood effectively – when the heart doesn't pump blood effectively, the lungs, brain, and all other organs can't work properly and may shut down or be damaged
- There are a variety of arrhythmias, and they can produce a broad range of symptoms and results; an arrhythmia can also be silent, meaning you don't notice any symptoms
- A doctor can find an irregular heartbeat during a physical exam by taking your pulse or through an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)

CORONARY HEART DISEASE

- Coronary heart disease (CHD) is a common term for the buildup of plaque in the heart's arteries that could lead to heart attack
- Certain CHD risk factors cannot be controlled, such as:
 - Family history - A family history of early CHD is a risk factor for developing CHD, specifically if a father or brother is diagnosed before age 55, or a mother or sister is diagnosed before age 65
 - Age - Post-menopausal or age 55+ (for women) and age 45+ (for men)
 - Gender - Some risk factors may affect CHD risk differently in women than in men (e.g., estrogen provides women some protection against CHD, whereas diabetes raises the risk of CHD more in women than in men)
- However, there are many CHD risk factors you can control:
 - High LDL cholesterol and triglycerides
 - Low HDL cholesterol
 - High blood pressure
 - Diabetes and prediabetes
 - Smoking
 - Obesity and being overweight
 - Lack of physical activity
 - Unhealthy diet
 - Stress
- You can help prevent CHD with simple lifestyle changes:
 - Eat a heart-healthy diet – Limit sodium, saturated and trans fats, added sugars, and alcohol; consume more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free/low-fat dairy products, fish, lean meats, eggs, nuts/seeds, soy products, legumes, and vegetable oils (except coconut and palm oils)
 - Aim for a healthy weight - A healthy weight for adults is typically when your body mass index (BMI) is between 18.5 and 24.9
 - Manage stress in healthy ways - Consider meditating, exercising, speaking with a qualified mental healthcare provider, meeting with a community support group, etc.
 - Participate in regular physical activity - Everyone should try to engage in moderate-intensity aerobic exercise at least 150 minutes per week, or vigorous aerobic exercise for 75 minutes per week – the more active you are, the more you will benefit
 - Stop smoking (or don't start!) - Smoking can raise your risk for coronary heart disease and heart attack and worsen other coronary heart disease risk factors