



RISK FACTORS YOU CAN CONTROL

■ HOW BLOOD PRESSURE AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Blood pressure is the force of your blood pushing against your artery walls. When your heart is relaxed, it is in diastole. When contracted, it is in systole. The force, or blood pressure, is stronger when your heart contracts and weaker when your heart relaxes. Your doctor or nurse reports your blood pressure with two numbers - a higher number over a lower number. The top number is referring to the systolic pressure (when your heart contracts). The bottom number is your diastolic pressure (when your heart relaxes). Blood pressure is measured in millimeters of mercury, or mm/Hg. Normal blood pressure for an adult is about 120 over 80 mm/Hg. Your blood pressure reading tells your doctor how hard your heart is working. High blood pressure indicates that your heart is working extra hard to move blood through your arteries. This can lead to a higher risk of developing heart problems, strokes, and kidney problems.

■ HOW SMOKING AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Many of us link smoking to cancer. But in fact, among smokers worldwide it is heart and blood vessel disease - not cancer - that is the #1 cause of death. That's because smoking damages the lining of your arteries and promotes plaque buildup. Plaque is made of fatty deposits like cholesterol that collect inside the walls of your arteries. Over time, these deposits can block the arteries and cut off the blood and oxygen supply. This buildup can lead to heart attack and stroke. Smoking is also linked to:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Irregular heartbeats
- Sudden cardiac death (SCD)
- Heart failure

■ HOW EXERCISE AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Only 44% of American adults get some exercise. But it is not regular or intense enough to help their hearts and overall health. Another 28% of Americans aren't active at all. Exercise needs to become a habit - part of your regular routine and lifestyle.

Exercise can help decrease:

- The risk of heart disease
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure

Exercise can help improve:

- Blood flow through your body
- Muscle strength, increasing your ability to do other physical activities
- Lung function

Other benefits of exercise include:

- Helps you lose weight or maintain a desirable weight
- Boosts your energy level
- Relieves tension and helps to manage stress
- Improves self-image
- Helps ease anxiety and depression
- Prevents bone loss
- Helps you sleep better

■ HOW DIET AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

The foods you eat have a huge impact on your health. When you improve your eating habits, you improve your overall health. Eat more fiber - Fiber improves your cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Controlling blood sugar levels is important for people with pre-diabetes or diabetes. Eat plenty of fresh vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals, dried beans, and oats. Limit your alcohol consumption - Too much alcohol can increase your blood pressure, cause heart failure and lead to stroke. Drink alcohol in moderation with no more than one drink per day for women and two for men. Limit the amount of fat in your diet - Saturated fat or cholesterol can cause plaque buildup in your arteries, which increases your risk for stroke or heart attack. Watch how much salt you eat - Salt is found in many canned foods, frozen dinners, and fast foods. Too much salt in the diet can raise blood pressure.

■ HOW WEIGHT AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

People who maintain a normal body weight are helping their own health. 35% of US adults are overweight and an additional 30% are obese. 16% of US children and teens are also overweight. Excess weight can affect your health by:

- Raising LDL or low-density lipoprotein (bad cholesterol)
- Lowering HDL or high-density lipoprotein (good cholesterol)
- Raising blood pressure
- Making you more likely to get diabetes
- Affecting our joints and movement
- Causing gall bladder disease
- Causing sleep apnea and breathing problems
- Impacting some cancers

■ HOW STRESS AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Stress is a part of modern life for most people. If left unchecked, stress can take a toll on your health. Stress or anxiety has a biological impact on your body and mind. Your pituitary gland (at the base of your brain) and your adrenal glands (near your kidneys) release certain hormones. These hormone releases caused by stress can affect:

- Your heart and blood vessels, causing an increased heart rate. This can raise blood pressure, and cause cholesterol levels to increase. Together, these can increase your risk of heart attack or stroke.
- Your digestive system, affecting your stomach and intestines which can lead to digestive health problems.
- Your immune system, weakening your immune system and making you more susceptible to disease and infection.
- A variety of skin conditions
- An asthma attack

■ HOW DIABETES AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Diabetes is a health problem which is reaching epidemic proportions in America. 20.6 million adults in the United States have been diagnosed with diabetes, with another 6 million who have diabetes and don't know it. The number of Americans living with diabetes has doubled over the last 20 years. There are several types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes normally affects children. In Type 1 diabetes the pancreas fails to produce an important hormone called insulin. Type 2 diabetes accounts for about 95% of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is caused when the body doesn't use insulin effectively or fails to make enough insulin. A small number of women will develop diabetes during pregnancy. People with diabetes are much more likely to develop heart and vascular problems than those who don't have diabetes. These complications include:

- Adults with diabetes are two to four times more likely to die of heart disease than adults without diabetes.
- The risk of stroke increases by two to four times in people with diabetes.
- About 73% of adults with diabetes have high blood pressure.
- People with diabetes account for around 60% of lower-limb amputations due to loss of blood flow to the limbs.

Heart disease is not only develops more frequently in adults with diabetes, but also occurs earlier and is more often fatal. The risk factors for Type 2 diabetes include:

- Older age (over 20% of people over age 60 have diabetes).
- Obesity
- Family history of diabetes
- Physical inactivity.
- Race - African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans and Native Americans are at a particularly high risk.

Patients with diabetes have trouble controlling cholesterol and glucose (a type of sugar) in their blood. This combination allows plaque (fatty buildup in arteries) to develop, making arteries narrower and less flexible. This can lead to blood clots, heart attack, and stroke. Type 2 diabetes is managed by:

- Eating a healthy diet.
- Controlling high blood pressure and high cholesterol with medication.
- Exercising regularly.
- Losing excess weight.
- Taking oral medication or insulin.