

# Types of heart conditions and their causes



There are various heart diseases out there. Some are present at birth, develop during childhood, at a young age or later in life. Those that develop later in life are most common and they affect more people. This Heart Awareness month will focus on these conditions since they are often preventable through managing risk factors.

## Heart disease can present as:

- A heart attack – chest pain, upper back and neck pain, heart burn, nausea and vomiting, dizziness or shortness of breath. Symptoms are sudden and acute.
- Arrhythmia (means irregular heart beat) – palpitations and heart fluttering instead of a normal heart beat. Happens at erratic times or can be significant enough to cause a heart attack.
- Heart failure – shortness of breath, fatigue, swollen legs and body, cannot lie down flat without coughing and feeling out of breath. Occurs slowly, over time and gets worse if untreated.



## How do we keep our hearts healthy?

Most heart diseases result from risk factors that can be managed. Managing these risk factors can be done by making good lifestyle choices such as:

### 1. Stopping smoking

Smoking increases the formation of plaque in the blood vessels, narrowing the arteries that transport blood to the various organs of the body. It therefore increases the chances of developing hypertension and therefore heart disease. In addition, tobacco smoking damages the airways in the lungs and leads to chronic lung conditions, including lung cancer. It is never too late to quit smoking.

### 2. Cutting down on alcohol

There is a clear link between regularly drinking too much alcohol and development of hypertension. Over time, this high blood pressure causes strain on the heart muscle and leads to heart attacks and stroke.

### 3. Exercising

Aerobic exercises (cardio) are the most effective exercises to keep your heart healthy. These include jogging, running and cycling. Exercise should be regular and intense enough to raise your breathing and heart rate. Increasing your heart rate to double its normal rate is adequate enough degree of exercise.

### 4. Eating a balanced diet

Increase fruits and vegetables in your diet. Add fiber in the form of nuts, berries, grain-filled bread, brown rice and bran cereal. Eat more plant based proteins such as beans. Animal based proteins such as fish should be added a few times a week. Cut down on sugary foods, processed foods and dairy products. Do not skip meals and keep your food portions small.

### 5. Maintaining a healthy weight

Keeping your weight under control reduces strain on the heart muscle and reduces the effect of high cholesterol on the heart. Exercise is the healthiest way to burn calories.

### 6. Scheduling regular health check-ups

Visit your healthcare provider at least once a year for your health check-up.



## Are men more likely to get heart disease?

Research has found that men are twice as likely as women to have heart attacks. In fact, men tend to get repeated heart attacks and repeated admissions to hospital due to heart failure compared to women. Studies in the United Kingdom show that 1 in 10 men over the age of 50 have a 'heart age' 10 years older than they are. While 1 in 11 women develop or die from heart diseases, the stats are higher in men with 1 in 7 men most likely to develop or die from heart diseases.

The risk factors for heart disease are the same for both genders (hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol and obesity). However, stress and the ability to manage stress and its effect on the body is thought to be the biggest difference-maker between men and women.

There is a greater need for men to practice healthier lifestyle choices and in addition, pay much attention to stress and how to manage it.

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