



Heart Health

February is American Heart Month, a time to educate ourselves about heart disease, risk factors, and ways to maintain a healthy heart. Did you know that heart disease is the number one killer of men and women in the U.S.? ⁽¹⁾

The term *heart disease* includes several specific heart conditions, including coronary artery disease (CAD), heart failure, and heart arrhythmias. The most common heart condition in the U.S. is CAD ⁽¹⁾.

CAD occurs when blood vessels carrying blood to the heart become hardened or narrowed. This is caused by a fatty buildup of cholesterol, calcium, and other substances inside the blood vessel ⁽²⁾.

When blood flow and oxygen to the heart muscle is reduced or stopped, it can lead to a *heart attack*. Common symptoms of a heart attack include ⁽¹⁾:

- Chest discomfort (feelings of pressure, squeezing, or pain)
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea, dizziness, or sweating

According to the American Heart Association, there are several risk factors

that increase your risk of developing heart disease and suffering a heart attack. Some risk factors can be treated by taking medication or changing lifestyle habits; while others are out of your control, such as, age, gender, and race. Common risk factors for coronary artery disease include ⁽³⁾:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure and cholesterol
- Obesity and lack of exercise
- Diabetes
- Excessive alcohol use, poor diet, and increased stress

After a complete physical exam, your doctor may order one or more of the following screening tests to help determine if you have a heart condition ⁽²⁾:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)
- Stress test (treadmill or exercise test)
- Nuclear scan (thallium stress test)
- Echocardiogram
- Coronary angiography

For more information on heart health, please visit the following web-links:

Heart Health Information:

- [All About Heart Disease](#)
- [Making Healthy Food Choices](#)
- [Nutrition Calculator](#)
- [Heart Health for Kids](#)

References:

1. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
2. [U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health](#)
3. [American Heart Association](#)

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