

Heart Awareness



What is heart disease?

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), which affects the blood flow to the heart. Decreased blood flow can cause a heart attack.

What are the symptoms of heart disease?

Sometimes heart disease may be “silent” and not diagnosed until a person experiences signs or symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, or an arrhythmia. When these events happen, symptoms may include:

- Heart attack: Chest pain or discomfort, upper back or neck pain, indigestion, heartburn, nausea or vomiting, extreme fatigue, upper body discomfort, dizziness, and shortness of breath.
- Arrhythmia: Fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations).
- Heart failure: Shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling of the feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, or neck veins.

What is a heart attack?

A heart attack, also called a myocardial infarction, happens when a part of the heart muscle doesn’t get enough blood. The more time that passes without treatment to restore blood flow, the greater the damage to the heart muscle. Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the main cause of heart attack. A less common cause is a severe spasm, or sudden contraction, of a coronary artery that can stop blood flow to the heart muscle.

What can I do to recover after a heart attack?

If you’ve had a heart attack, your heart may be damaged. This could affect your heart’s rhythm and its ability to pump blood to the rest of the body. You may also be at risk for another heart attack or conditions such as stroke, kidney disorders, and peripheral arterial disease (PAD).

You can lower your chances of having future health problems following a heart attack with these steps:

- **Physical activity**—Talk with your health care team about the things you do each day in your life and work. Your doctor may want you to limit work, travel, or sexual activity for some time after a heart attack.
- **Lifestyle changes**—Eating a healthier diet, increasing physical activity, quitting smoking, and managing stress—in addition to taking prescribed medicines—can help improve your heart health and quality of life. Ask your health care team about attending a program called cardiac rehabilitation to help you make these lifestyle changes.