Heart Disease: It Can Happen at Any Age

Heart disease doesn't happen just to older adults. It is happening to younger adults more and more often. This is partly because the conditions that lead to heart disease are happening at younger ages. February is Heart Month, the perfect time to learn about your risk for heart disease and the steps you need to take now to help your heart.

Heart disease—and the conditions that lead to it—can happen at any age. High rates of obesity and high blood pressure among younger people (ages 35-64) are putting them at risk for heart disease earlier in life. Half of all Americans have at least one of the top three risk factors for heart disease (high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking).

You Could Be at Risk

Many of the conditions and behaviors that put people at risk for heart disease are appearing at younger ages:

- **High blood pressure.** Millions of Americans of all ages have high blood pressure, including millions of people in their 40s and 50s. About half of people with high blood pressure don't have it under control. Having uncontrolled high blood pressure is one of the biggest risks for heart disease and other harmful conditions, such as stroke.
- **High blood cholesterol.** High cholesterol can increase the risk for heart disease. Having diabetes and obesity, smoking, eating unhealthy foods, and not getting enough physical activity can all contribute to unhealthy cholesterol levels.
- **Smoking.** More than 37 million U.S. adults are current smokers, and thousands of young people start smoking each day. Smoking damages the blood vessels and can cause heart disease.

On average, U.S. adults have hearts that are 7 years than they should be. Watch this video, and figure out your own "heart age" by taking this quiz.

Other conditions and behaviors that affect your risk for heart disease include:

- **Obesity.** Carrying extra weight puts stress on the heart. More than 1 in 3 Americans—and nearly 1 in 6 children ages 2 to 19—has obesity.
- **Diabetes.** Diabetes causes sugar to build up in the blood. This can damage blood vessels and nerves that help control the heart muscle. Nearly 1 in 10 people in the United States has diabetes.
- **Physical inactivity.** Staying physically active helps keep the heart and blood vessels healthy. Only 1 in 5 adults meets the physical activity guidelines of getting 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity.
- **Unhealthy eating patterns.** Most Americans, including children, eat too much sodium (salt), which increases blood pressure. Replacing foods high in sodium with fresh fruits and vegetables can help lower blood pressure. But only 1 in 10 adults is getting enough fruits and vegetables each day. Diet high in trans-fat, saturated fat, and added sugar increases the risk factor for heart disease.

4 Ways to Take Control of Your Heart Health

You're in the driver's seat when it comes to your heart. Learn how to be heart healthy at any age.

Don't smoke. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, learn how to quit.

Manage conditions. Work with your health care team to manage conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. This includes taking any

medicines you have been prescribed. Learn more about preventing and managing [high blood pressure](#) and [high cholesterol](#).

Make heart-healthy eating changes. Eat food low in trans-fat, saturated fat, added sugar and sodium. Try to fill at least half your plate with vegetables and fruits, and aim for low sodium options. Learn more about [how to reduce sodium](#).

Stay active. Get moving for at least 150 minutes per week. You can even break up the 30 minutes into 10-minute blocks. Learn more about [how to get enough physical activity](#).

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
https://www.cdc.gov/features/heartmonth/index.html

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