

Common Risk Factors

Heart Disease

Blood Cholesterol Levels

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is another major risk factor for heart disease. It is a condition where the pressure of the blood in the arteries is too high. There are often no symptoms to signal high blood pressure. Lowering blood pressure by changes in lifestyle or by medication can lower the risk of heart disease and heart attack.

Diabetes Mellitus

Diabetes also increases a person's risk for heart disease. With diabetes, the body either doesn't make enough insulin, can't use its own insulin as well as it should, or both. This causes sugars to build up in the blood. About three-quarters of people with diabetes die of some form of heart or blood vessel disease.

Behavioral Factors

Tobacco Use

Diet

Several aspects of peoples' dietary patterns have been linked to heart disease and related conditions. These include diets high in saturated fats and cholesterol, which raise blood cholesterol levels and promote atherosclerosis. High salt or sodium in the diet causes raised blood pressure levels.

Physical Inactivity

Obesity

Alcohol

Excessive alcohol use leads to an increase in blood pressure, and increases the risk for heart disease. It also **increases blood levels of triglycerides** which contributes to atherosclerosis.

Stroke

Stroke prevention is still the best medicine.

The most important treatable conditions linked to stroke are:

High blood pressure. Treat it.

Eat a balanced diet, maintain a healthy weight, and exercise to reduce blood pressure. Drugs are also available.

Cigarette smoking. Quit.

Medical help is available to help quit.

Heart disease. Manage it.

Your doctor can treat your heart disease and may prescribe medication to help prevent the formation of clots. **If you are over 50**, NINDS scientists believe you and your doctor should make a decision about aspirin therapy.

Factors listed in Heart Disease shown in left column:

Blood Cholesterol Levels

Diet

Physical Inactivity

Obesity

Alcohol

Diabetes. Control it.

Treatment can delay complications that increase the risk of stroke.

Transient ischemic attacks (TIAs). Seek help.

TIAs are small strokes that last only for a few minutes or hours. They should never be ignored and can be treated with drugs or surgery.

Diabetes

Age greater than 45 years

Diabetes during a previous pregnancy

Excess body weight (especially around the waist)

Family history of diabetes

Given birth to a baby weighing more than 9 pounds

HDL cholesterol under 35

High blood levels of triglycerides,

a type of fat molecule (250 mg/dL or more)

High blood pressure

(greater than or equal to 140/90 mmHg)

Impaired glucose tolerance

Low activity level

Poor diet

Direct quotes from the following U.S. federal government websites:

http://www.cdc.gov/HeartDisease/risk_factors.htm

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/stroke/stroke_bookmark.htm

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002072.htm>