

Heart Disease

Fact Sheet

What is heart disease?

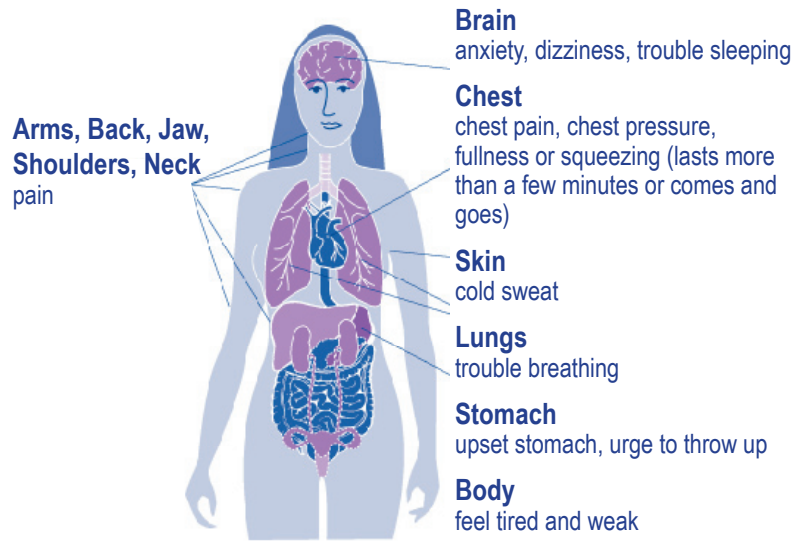
Heart disease is a term that includes several heart conditions. The most common heart disease in the United States is coronary heart disease, which often appears as a heart attack. Your heart muscle needs oxygen to survive. Blood with oxygen is carried to the heart muscle in blood vessels called coronary arteries. A buildup of fat and cholesterol, called plaque, can occur in the blood vessels. If plaque breaks, a blood clot forms. The blood clot can block the artery and shut off the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart muscle. A heart attack occurs when the heart muscle starves from lack of blood flow and dies. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women.

Heart disease takes many years to develop, and there are often no signs until a heart attack occurs. The most common symptom of a heart attack is chest pain or an intense pressure or squeezing in the chest that lasts more than a few minutes.

Other symptoms are:

- ◆ discomfort or pain in the upper parts of the body, such as the arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach
- ◆ breathing problems
- ◆ being sick to your stomach or nauseous

Signs of a Heart Attack



- ◆ feeling faint or woozy
- ◆ breaking out in a cold sweat.

What are the risk factors for heart disease?

Heart disease is usually caused by a number of factors. The more risk factors one has, the greater the chance for disease. Some risk factors cannot be changed or controlled, while other risk factors are controllable.

◆ Risk factors you can control:

- Smoking
- Drinking more than 1 alcoholic drink a day
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Diet high in fat, calories and cholesterol

