

Fact Sheet

Heart disease refers to several conditions that affect the heart. In the United States, it affects more than 1 in 10 adults (30 million) and is the leading cause of death for people of most racial and ethnic groups (responsible for about 1 in 4 deaths).

Office of Minority Health and Health Equity

What is heart disease?

Heart disease is a term that describes a variety of conditions that affect the heart's structure and function. Coronary heart disease, also known as coronary artery disease, is the most common type of heart disease. Some other types include arrhythmia, heart failure, heart attack, and heart valve disease.

Heart disease may not be diagnosed until a person experiences signs or symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, or an arrhythmia. These 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
- **Heart failure:** Shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling of the feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, or neck veins
- **Arrhythmia:** Fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations)



Who is at risk?

High blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking are key risk factors for heart disease. About half of all adults in the United States have at least one of these risk factors.

Other medical conditions and health behaviors that put you at higher risk are:

- Diabetes
- Alcohol use
- Unhealthy diet
- Physical inactivity
- Overweight and obesity

Your risk for heart disease increases as you age and if you have a history of heart disease in your family.

How is heart disease treated?

Your health care provider may prescribe one or more FDA-approved medications to treat your heart disease or its risk factors. Some types of heart disease are also treated with medical devices such as pacemakers (implanted in the body to regulate the heart rate) or stents (metal tubes that are inserted in an artery to improve blood flow). Your health care provider will work with you to determine which treatment is the best option for your condition.

Participating in a cardiac rehabilitation (rehab) program after having a heart attack, heart failure, or some type of heart surgery is important for recovery. Supervised by a team of health care professionals, this program may include:

- Physical activity
- Counseling to find ways to relieve stress and improve your mental health
- Education about healthy living (such as healthy eating), taking medication as prescribed, and ways to help you quit smoking

Heart disease and clinical trials

The FDA encourages diverse participation in clinical trials. If you think a clinical trial may be right for you, talk to your health care provider. You can also search for clinical trials in your area at www.clinicaltrials.gov.

For more information on health equity, visit www.fda.gov/healthequity.

