

## Understanding Heart Disease

Heart disease can come in different forms including narrowing of the arteries due to high cholesterol levels causing plaque buildup (coronary artery disease or CAD) as well as congestive heart failure (CHF).

### Heart Disease Facts:

- Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women. More than half of the deaths due to heart disease in 2009 were in men.
- About 610,000 Americans die from heart disease each year—that's 1 in every 4 deaths.
- Coronary heart disease is the most common type of heart disease, killing more than 370,000 people annually.
- In the United States, someone has a heart attack every 43 seconds. Each minute, someone in the United States dies from a heart disease-related event.

### Risk Factors:

High blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, and smoking are key heart disease risk factors for heart disease. About half of Americans (49%) have at least one of these three risk factors.

Several other medical conditions and lifestyle choices can also put people at a higher risk for heart disease, including:

- Diabetes
  - Being overweight
  - Poor diet
  - Physical inactivity
  - Excessive alcohol use
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## **Congestive Heart Failure (CHF):**

CHF is often a long-term, chronic condition, but it can also have a sudden onset. The heart muscle itself has difficulty filling or discharging blood out of the chambers. CHF can have different causes including: uncontrolled high blood pressure, CAD, heart attacks, congenital heart disease, abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias), leaky heart valves, and infections that may weaken the heart muscle or valves.

Symptoms of heart failure often begin slowly. At first, they may only occur when you are very active. Over time, you may notice breathing problems and other symptoms even when you are resting.

### **Common symptoms are:**

- Cough
- Fatigue, weakness, feeling faint
- Loss of appetite
- Pulse that feels fast or irregular, or a sensation of feeling the heart beat (palpitations)
- Shortness of breath when you are active or after you lie down
- Swollen (enlarged) liver or abdomen
- Swollen feet and ankles (edema)
- Waking up from sleep due to shortness of breath
- Weight gain

### **Suggestions to improve your health if diagnosed with heart disease include changes to your lifestyle:**

- Moderate alcohol consumption in consultation with your doctor.
- End tobacco and nicotine use, including electronic cigarettes.
- Stay active, but do not exercise on days when your weight has gone up from fluid retention or if you are not feeling well.
- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Lowering your cholesterol by changing your diet.
- Getting enough rest, including after exercise, eating, or other activities. This allows your heart to rest too.

*Adapted from online information by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. For more information visit: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and the American Heart Association [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)*

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