Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), Risk Factors

Research has shown that the risk of developing coronary artery disease (CAD) and having a heart attack increases with each factor you have.

RISK FACTORS YOU **CANNOT** CHANGE

- **Your age.** Your risk goes up as you get older. Most heart attacks happen to people over the age of 65.
- **Gender.** Men have a greater risk of heart attack than women, and they have attacks earlier in life. However, women are more likely to die from a heart attack.
- **Heredity.** Children of parents with heart disease are more likely to develop it themselves.
- **Race.** African Americans and other ethnic groups have a higher risk, possibly because of high blood pressure, a tendency toward obesity, and diabetes.
- **Your family.** Most people with a strong family history of heart disease have one or more other risk factors.

RISK FACTORS YOU **CAN** CHANGE

- **Exposure to tobacco smoke.** Even secondhand smoke greatly increases the risk for heart disease.
- **High blood cholesterol** may be lowered with changes in diet, activity, and medicines.
- **High blood pressure** makes the heart work harder. This causes the heart muscles to become thick and, eventually, weaker. It also increases your risk of stroke, heart attack, and kidney or heart failure.
- **Physical inactivity** is a risk factor for CAD. Regular physical activity helps prevent heart and blood vessel disease. Exercise helps control blood cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, and it may help lower blood pressure in some people.
- **Excess body fat,** especially belly fat, increases the risk of heart disease and stroke even if there are no other risk factors. Excess weight increases the heart's workload and raises blood pressure and blood cholesterol.
- **Diabetes** seriously increases your risk of developing CAD. If you have diabetes, you should work with your caregiver to manage it and control other risk factors.

OTHER RISK FACTORS FOR CAD

- How you respond to stress.
- Drinking too much alcohol may raise blood pressure, cause heart failure, and lead to stroke.
- Total cholesterol greater than 200 milligrams.
- HDL (good) cholesterol less than 40 milligrams. HDL helps keep cholesterol from building up in the walls of the arteries.

PREVENTING CAD

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Exercise or do physical activity.
- Eat a heart-healthy diet low in fat and salt and high in fiber.
- Control your blood pressure to keep it below 120 over 80.
- Keep your cholesterol at a level that lowers your risk.
- Manage diabetes if you have it.
- Stop smoking.
- Learn how to manage stress.

HEART SMART SUBSTITUTIONS

- **Instead of** whole or 2% milk and cream, use skim milk.
- **Instead of** fried foods, eat baked, steamed, boiled, broiled, or microwaved foods.
- **Instead of** lard, butter, palm and coconut oils, cook with unsaturated vegetable oils, such as corn, olive, canola, safflower, sesame, soybean, sunflower, or peanut.
- **Instead of** fatty cuts of meat, eat lean cuts of meat or cut off the fatty parts.
- **Instead of** 1 whole egg in recipes, use 2 egg whites.

- **Instead of** sauces, butter, and salt, season vegetables with herbs and spices.
- **Instead of** regular hard and processed cheeses, eat low-fat, low-sodium cheeses.
- **Instead of** salted potato chips, choose low-fat, unsalted tortilla and potato chips and unsalted pretzels and popcorn.
- **Instead of** sour cream and mayonnaise, use plain low-fat yogurt, low-fat cottage cheese, or low-fat or "light" sour cream.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth

American Heart Association
www.heart.org/HEARTORG

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