

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heart Disease – Don't assume you're not at risk

Heart disease is the number one killer of men and women worldwide. It is responsible for 40 percent of all deaths in the US – more than all forms of cancer combined. Yet, it can still be easy to think it won't happen to you or that you're not at risk. Here are some truths we might need to know or be reminded of:

- Sometimes there are no symptoms before it is too late and a heart attack or heart damage has already occurred. For instance, high blood pressure may not have any immediate, physically felt symptoms, though it is actually making the heart work harder.
- While women tend to develop heart disease 7-8 years later than men, they are less likely to seek treatment for heart disease or recognize the symptoms of heart attack; thus, heart disease is the leading cause of death among women and a major cause of disability as well.
- People who are at a normal body weight may think they are protected and can eat any diet they choose. However, even people of a normal body weight can have blocked arteries and need to eat a healthy diet and participate in regular physical activity. Genetics and heredity can also play a part (having a father or brother diagnosed with heart disease before age 55 or a mother or sister before age 65 puts you at greater risk).
- Even one risk factor – like not being regularly physically active, smoking, or eating a poor diet – puts you at risk for heart disease. Multiple risk factors can “gang up” and worsen each other's effects.
- There is NO cure for heart disease – it is a lifelong condition. Medications, procedures, or surgeries do not cure heart disease. They can help improve blood flow, but your arteries remain damaged, and their condition will worsen unless you make changes in your daily habits. Heart disease risk factors include things you can change and some you can't. Risk factors you can work on include:

- Tobacco use
- Diabetes control
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol and triglycerides
- Physical inactivity
- Overweight or obesity
- Poor diet
- Uncontrolled stress or anger
- Consumption of alcohol
- Poor hygiene (handwashing, sleep, and dental care).

Risk factors you cannot control include:

- Age – Simply getting older puts you at increased risk.
- Gender – Men are generally at greater risk, although the risk is nearly equal after a woman goes through menopause, and women's rates of heart disease have been increasing for those aged 35-54.
- Race – African Americans have more severe high blood pressure than Caucasians and therefore have a higher risk of heart disease. Heart disease risk is also higher among Mexican Americans, American Indians, native Hawaiians and some Asian Americans, possibly due to higher rates of obesity and diabetes in these populations.
- Family history – Family history of early heart disease – a father or brother diagnosed before age 55 or a

mother or sister diagnosed before 65 – puts you at greater risk. The best things you can do to reduce your risks for heart disease is get screened regularly (and early – starting at age 20) and make lifestyle changes. Screening for heart disease simply means asking your doctor to give you some tests so that you can know your risks. These tests should include:

- A lipoprotein profile (to check cholesterol and triglycerides levels – forms of fat in the blood)
- Blood pressure (to see how hard the heart is working to pump blood through your arteries)
- Fasting blood glucose (to diagnose diabetes)
- Body Mass Index (BMI) and waist circumference (to assess your weight in relationship to your height as well as the where your weight is distributed – more weight around the waist puts one at greater risk). Whether you're at risk for heart disease or not, having a healthy lifestyle will benefit you and help prevent heart disease or reduce your risk factors. Concentrate especially on these “big four” habits:

1. Eat a nutritious diet. In general, eat more foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber. These include fruits and vegetables, whole grains and grain products, beans and peas, fat-free and low-fat milk products, lean meats and poultry without skin, fatty fish, and nuts and seeds in limited amounts. Consult a registered dietician for heart-healthy diet recommendations. Or go online to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to see the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) or TLC (Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes) diet plans at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/index.htm> and http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/chol/chol_tlc.htm, respectively.

2. Engage in regular physical activity. If you have been sedentary, try working your way up to 30 minutes of continuous activity – starting with three 10 minute bouts of exercise three times a day. Start slow and work toward a more moderate or vigorous rate of activity over time. Try to be physically active for at least 30 minutes at least 4 days a week – working toward more days each week. If you are already moderately physically active, work toward 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity on most days of the week to manage weight and prevent gradual, unhealthy weight gain. Consult your doctor for physical activity recommendations

3. Maintain a healthy weight. To lose weight, most overweight people will need to cut 500 to 1,000 calories per day from their current diet – striving for no more than ½ to 2 lbs weight loss per week. Remember that you take in calories from the food you eat and burn off calories by physical activity – so both diet and physical activity are needed. Maintaining a healthy weight requires more than a one-time weight loss – it requires a different lifestyle. Don't be discouraged – a loss of just 5-10 percent of your current weight can lower your heart disease risk. Losing even 10 pounds can help lower your heart disease risk. Start with a small goal and work toward a healthy lifestyle.

4. Quit tobacco. For those who smoke, this may seem an impossible task. Don't stop trying. Quitting smoking immediately reduces your risk of heart disease, cancer, and other serious disorders. If you have tried to quit before and been unsuccessful – try again. Ask your doctor about the latest “quit-smoking” aids. Several new medications have been released and shown to be effective for smokers in their efforts to fight nicotine addiction. For more information, contact your Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Cameron county agent at 956-361-8236 For more information on heart disease, please see our Health Hints newsletter at <http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/healthhints/2010/feb/heart-disease.pdf>.

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