



# HEART DISEASE

## ***What does the heart do?***

The heart is a muscle in the chest that pumps blood all over the body. Every day, the heart pumps about 2,000 gallons of blood through it. The heart pushes the blood through veins and arteries. These are tubes that carry the blood to all parts of the body. Blood carries oxygen, nutrients and other things to all parts of the body, including the heart. The heart is a muscle, and is also a vital organ. A vital organ is one that is needed to be alive, so it is very important to protect the one you have!

## ***What is heart disease?***

When people think of heart disease, they usually think about hardening of the arteries. But there are a few different diseases of the heart. Some of these are present before a person is born. Others happen because of another disease or problem, and some happen as a person gets older or as a result of poor eating and exercise habits.

*Hardening of the arteries.* This happens when the arteries that feed the heart become clogged and narrow. Less oxygen and nutrients get to the heart. The muscle of the heart becomes starved so that it cannot work to pump blood, like it should. If the heart is not getting enough blood to feed it, the muscle begins to cramp, much like a cramp in the leg.

The pain from a cramp in the heart is called *angina*. Angina is the main symptom of this kind of heart disease. It is often described as a discomfort, heaviness, pressure, aching, burning, numbness, fullness, squeezing or painful feeling. People sometimes think it is an upset stomach or heartburn. Angina is usually felt in the chest, but may also be felt in the left shoulder, arms, neck, back or jaw. Other symptoms are shortness of breath, rapid heartbeats (a feeling of “flip-flops” in your chest), nausea, sweating, and weakness or dizziness. If you or someone near you has these symptoms, do not hesitate to call 9-1-1 immediately!

## ***Heart Attack.***

The heart is a muscle that works constantly, pumping blood to all parts of the body. It needs to be fed oxygen and nutrients to keep it in good working order. The coronary arteries are what feed the heart with these nutrients. When a person has coronary artery disease, fatty substances, calcium and other things make the arteries narrow. This substance is hard on the outside and mushy on the inside. The hard part can break open. When it does, the blood that is trying to get through forms a clot around it. If this clot blocks the artery off entirely, then no blood is getting to the heart muscle to feed it. The heart muscle becomes starved for oxygen. Pretty soon, that area of heart muscle dies. This is a heart attack. The amount of heart muscle that is hurt depends on how much of it was fed by that artery. This damage is permanent. The heart will heal, but where the blood supply was cut off turns to scarring. It will not pump blood as well as the rest of the heart. This makes the pumping action of the heart weaker.

Symptoms of a heart attack include: pressure, heaviness, or pain in the chest, arm or below the breastbone; discomfort going to the back, jaw, throat or arm; a feeling of fullness, indigestion or choking (like heartburn). Other symptoms are sweating, nausea, vomiting or dizziness; extreme weakness, anxiety or shortness of breath; or rapid or irregular heartbeats. During a heart attack, symptoms last longer than 30 minutes and are do not feel better after taking medicine.

If you or someone near you is having these symptoms, call 9-1-1 right away. Heart attacks must be treated quickly. The longer a person waits, the more damage is done to the heart muscle. Remember that the chest discomfort can be different for each person. If any of the above symptoms are present, it is best to get emergency care right away.

## ***Who gets heart disease?***

While anyone can get heart disease, there are certain things about a person can make him or her more likely to have it:

- Male sex
- Older age
- Family history of heart disease
- Post-menopausal
- Race (African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans are more likely to have heart disease than Caucasians)

The above things cannot be helped. But there are many things that a person does that also can make them more likely to get heart disease. These are:

- Smoking
- Cholesterol problems
- High blood pressure
- Lack of exercise
- ObesityDiabetes
- High stress and anger

## ***What you can do to prevent heart disease***

You can reduce your chances of getting heart disease by paying attention to these things and making lifestyle changes. Doing things like quitting smoking, exercising, and watching your diet will help prevent heart disease. It will also help you to feel better, have more energy, and live well! Ask your doctor for more information on how to make these positive changes in your life.