



HAYNES CARDIOVASCULAR INSTITUTE

Heart Disease: Know Your Risk Factors

Heart disease continues to be the number one cause of death in the US and the world. Cardiovascular disease claims more lives each year than all forms of cancer and chronic lower respiratory disease combined.¹ Perhaps surprisingly, Marin has a higher incidence of heart disease than many other counties in California.² The good news is many risk factors can be controlled, and heart disease can be reduced or reversed with lifestyle changes.

Uncontrollable Risk Factors

Some of our risk factors are tied to our genes, gender, or our ethnicity.

- **Family history.** Having a parent or sibling who has had coronary heart disease, a heart attack, or heart surgery before ages 55 in men and 65 in women.
- **Age.** Men above the age of 55 and women 65 and older have a greater risk of heart disease.
- **Gender.** The risk for heart disease before age 65 is greater in men.
- **Ethnicity.** Compared to the general population, Black Americans, Native Americans, and South Asians (people who trace their ancestry to India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Bangladesh) all have an elevated risk of heart disease.

Sources: ¹ American Heart Association ² HealthyMarin.org ³ 2018 Guidelines posted by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology

Controllable Risk Factors

Controllable risk factors are the ones you can mitigate with the right lifestyle changes.

- **Blood Pressure.** Blood pressure measures the force with which your blood pushes against the walls of your blood vessels. High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is the most common risk factor for stroke and heart disease. If you have high blood pressure, your heart has to work harder to pump your blood. Over time, this puts you at risk for heart disease and stroke.

120
80

Systolic pressure indicates the maximum pressure your heart exerts when it beats.

Diastolic pressure the maximum pressure in your arteries between heartbeats.

Blood Pressure Categories ³	Systolic Mm Hg (Upper Number)		Diastolic Mm Hg (Lower Number)
Normal	Less than 120	and	Less than 80
Elevated	120-129	and	Less than 80
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 1	130-139	or	80-89
High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Stage 2	140 or Higher		90 or Higher
Hypertensive Crisis (consult your doctor immediately)	Higher than 180		Higher than 120

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- **Cholesterol.**

Your body actually makes and needs its own cholesterol. It is used to make hormones, vitamin D, and bile, which is needed for digestion and food absorption. However, cholesterol is also found in certain foods, including saturated fats and trans fats, fatty meats, egg yolks, and dairy. If excess cholesterol accumulates in the arteries, it narrows and hardens the blood vessels, reducing blood flow. Over time, this can cause dangerous blockages leading to a heart attack.

The American Heart Association recommends that all adults above the age of 20 have their cholesterol levels checked every four to six years. Results can be affected by your diet, age, alcohol use, medical history, pregnancy, and medication. Here is what the numbers could mean:

Less than 200 mg/dL: **Low risk for heart disease**

200 mg/dL to 239 mg/dL: **Some risk for heart disease**

240 mg/dL or higher: **High risk for heart disease**

Diabetes

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adults with diabetes are **two to four times more likely to die from heart disease**. People with diabetes tend to have elevated cholesterol and high blood pressure, both risk factors for heart disease. In addition, type 2 diabetes is often linked to yet another heart disease risk factor, obesity. People whose weight is 20% higher than it should be or who have a BMI of 29 or above are considered obese. Excess weight influences insulin resistance, which can lead to prediabetes and eventually, diabetes.

Lifestyle

Certain aspects of your lifestyle can have a negative impact on your cardiovascular health:

- **A sedentary lifestyle** is a major risk factor for heart disease, high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. The American Heart Association recommends a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity at least five days per week or 25 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity at least three days per week. Exercise strengthens your heart, helps control blood pressure, and reduces plaque build-up in the arteries. Even if you are good about exercising, sitting for long periods of time can increase your heart disease risk.
- **Poor sleep** has a negative impact on metabolism, blood pressure, and inflammation and raises your risk of developing a heart condition. Obstructive sleep apnea, which lowers oxygen levels in the blood, disrupts breathing, and increases the heart rate, also raises heart disease risk. If you snore a lot or often feel tired even after a full night's sleep, sleep apnea could be the cause. Talk to your doctor if you get less than seven hours of sleep a night.
- **Stress** is an important risk factor that people tend to minimize. Ongoing stress actually does increase your risk of heart disease. Try to reduce your stress level through yoga, meditation, tai chi, guided imagery, or breathing exercises.
- **Excessive alcohol consumption** can contribute to high blood pressure and weight gain and cause irregular heartbeats. If you do drink, make sure to limit consumption to no more than two drinks per day for men, and one for women.

