Heart Disease

Heart disease is a common term for coronary artery disease. It is the number one cause of death in both men and women over the age of 60 in the United States.

Causes
Heart disease is caused by atherosclerosis – a buildup of plaque in the inner walls of the arteries – which narrows, slows or blocks the flow of blood to the heart.

Warning Signs
Most people know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack, but recognizing the warning signs of other types of heart disease – angina and heart failure – is less likely due to their slow progression:
- **Angina** – Pain, discomfort or a squeezing pressure in chest; aching tooth, jaw or neck; symptoms that subside with rest; may occur with anger, excitement or exertion
- **Heart Failure** – Shortness of breath; extreme tiredness and weakness; swelling in the lower legs, ankles or feet; dry cough or cough with pink, frothy mucus; rapid weight gain; rapid heartbeat

Risk Factors
Controllable risk factors for heart disease include:
- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Being overweight or obese
- Lack of physical activity
- Having Type 2 diabetes and high blood cholesterol
- Using cocaine or amphetamines
- Metabolic syndrome

Treatment
The goals of treatment are to relieve symptoms, control or reduce risk factors, stop or slow further damage to the arteries, and prevent and treat cardiac events. Treatment includes:
- Self-care and prevention measures
- Medications
- Procedures to open blocked or narrowed arteries or to bypass them
- Cardiac rehabilitation

Self-Care/Prevention
- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Don't smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Take all medications as prescribed.
- Ask your doctor about taking a low dose of aspirin daily to help prevent heart disease.
- Watch for signs of diabetes and see your doctor if you have any.
- Follow a diet low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol. Limit sodium intake to 1,500 to 2,400 milligrams per day (dependent on body weight and/or your doctor's recommendations).
- Get regular exercise.
- Manage stress by practicing relaxation techniques.
- Drink alcohol in moderation (no more than two drinks per day for men; one drink per day for women and people older than age 65.) Check with your doctor to find out if and how much you can drink.

Did You Know...?
As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

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