

# Coronary Heart Disease

## Reducing your risk

### What is coronary heart disease?

Coronary heart disease (also called CHD) is sometimes also called coronary artery disease. Arteries carry blood to your heart. When fatty material builds up in the arteries, it blocks or slows the flow of blood and oxygen. This can happen in any artery, but when it happens in the arteries of the heart (the coronary arteries), you could have a heart attack. Both men and women can get CHD. About 13.9 million Americans have CHD.

### What causes CHD?

CHD can run in the family. It might develop as you get older or if you are overweight or if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes. Unhealthy habits, like smoking, eating a diet high in fat and not exercising enough, can also cause CHD. Lifestyle changes can help lower your risk of CHD.

### What can I do to lower my risk of CHD?

1. Don't smoke. If you smoke, ask your doctor to help you quit. After 2 or 3 years of not smoking, your risk of CHD will be as low as the risk of a person who never smoked.
2. Lower your cholesterol. A healthy, low-fat diet is the way to start. Try to eat low-fat foods. Keep your daily fat

calories to less than 30% of your total calories. For adults, this means eating less than 60 grams of fat a day. Some people may also need medicine to lower their cholesterol.

3. Control your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, your doctor will suggest ways to lower your blood pressure. If you're taking medicine for high blood pressure, take it just the way your doctor wants you to, so your blood pressure will be as close to normal as possible.
4. Exercise. Regular exercise can reduce your risk of heart disease and make your heart stronger. Exercise can also help if you have high blood pressure. Before you start, talk to your doctor about the right kind of exercise for you. Try to exercise at least 3 times a week for at least 30 minutes each time.
5. Ask your doctor about taking a low dose of aspirin each day. Aspirin helps prevent CHD, but taking it also has some risks.
6. Ask your doctor about vitamins. Vitamin E has been shown to lower the risk of a heart attack. B vitamins may also protect against CHD.
7. If you have gone through menopause, ask your doctor about the benefits and risks of hormone replacement therapy (also called HRT). HRT may protect you against CHD.



## Additional comments from your family doctor

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

The American Academy of Family Physicians provides health information on the World Wide Web at [familydoctor.org](http://familydoctor.org).

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