

Heart Disease and Smoking

What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is a condition affecting your blood vessels and heart. A waxy substance called plaque builds up inside your blood vessels and narrows them. This makes it harder for blood to flow through your body, which can lead to blood clots, chest pain, heart attack and stroke. In the United States, heart disease is the leading cause of death in both men and women.

Signs and symptoms of heart disease can be different in men versus women. Women are more likely to have a “silent” condition, and not notice symptoms until their heart disease is serious.

Symptoms of heart disease:

- Chest pain or discomfort – during rest, during physical activity, or because of mental stress
 - This pain is more often described by men as “pressure” or “squeezing” and often described by women as “sharp” and “burning”
- Shortness of breath
- Palpitations (irregular heartbeats, or a “flip-flop” feeling in your chest)
- Weakness or dizziness
- Nausea
- Sweating

How Does Smoking Affect Heart Disease?

Smoking raises your risk for heart disease. It is one cause of the dangerous plaque building up inside your blood vessels. Plaque clogs and narrows the vessels, increases your blood pressure, and raises your heart rate. This extra strain on your heart can cause you to have a heart attack.

Smoking around others exposes them to second hand smoke, which increases their risk for heart disease, too, including heart attack and stroke.

Carbon monoxide (a deadly gas produced from cigarette smoke) decreases oxygen to your heart. This makes you more likely to have a heart attack or a stroke.

Smoking raises your risk for sudden death from a stroke or from a burst blood vessel (aneurysm). Quitting smoking will improve your heart health.

When You Stop Smoking

- Within 8 hours of smoking your last cigarette, your blood will have a normal level of oxygen again.
- Within 24 hours of smoking your last cigarette, your chance of having a heart attack will have already decreased.
- The longer you stay quit, the less likely you are to have a heart attack or stroke.
- You will protect your family, friends and coworkers from getting heart disease because of second hand smoke.



Thinking about quitting or ready to quit? Find help here.

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