

UNDERSTANDING HEART DISEASE

WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

Heart disease includes a range of conditions that affect your heart. Numerous diseases fall under this umbrella term, including coronary artery disease, heart rhythm problems, heart defects, and blood vessel diseases.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of heart disease may not be spotted until a person experiences events such as heart failure, heart attack, or arrhythmia. Symptoms depend on the type of heart disease you have, and may include:

- Chest pain or pressure
- Weakness or fatigue
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Swelling of limbs
- Pain or weakness in limbs
- Irregular heartbeat
- Neck, jaw, or throat pain
- Abdomen or back pain
- Fainting

RISK FACTORS FOR DEVELOPING HEART DISEASE

High Blood Pressure: When the pressure of the blood in your arteries is too high, it can affect your body's major organs, including your kidney, brain, and heart.

High Cholesterol: Through your diet, your body may take in more cholesterol than it can use. Excess cholesterol can build up along the walls of your arteries, narrowing them and leading to decreased blood flow to the brain, kidneys, heart, and other organs.

Obesity: Excess body fat often comes hand in hand with higher levels of "bad" cholesterol, which can narrow the arteries, making it more difficult for blood to flow through.

Diabetes Mellitus: Diabetes is linked to obesity and high blood pressure.

Lack of Physical Activity: Not getting enough exercise can increase your chances of having medical conditions that are risk factors, such as obesity, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

Poor Diet: Diets high in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol can cause plaque to build up in the walls of the arteries.

Alcohol and Tobacco Use: Drinking in excess can raise blood pressure levels and smoking can damage heart and blood vessels.

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

Peripheral Artery Disease: Build-up along the walls of your arteries can lead to this disease. Blood flow to your extremities becomes limited, causing leg pain when walking.

Heart Failure: This occurs when your heart can't pump enough blood to meet your body's needs. The heart continues working, but heart failure can change the way it functions.

Heart Attack: A blood clot blocks the blood flow to the heart, causing a heart attack that might damage or destroy part of the heart.

Stroke: Blood flow to the brain is obstructed, causing brain tissue to die.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest: Unexpected loss of heart function, which leads to loss of breathing and consciousness.

TREATMENT

Treatments may include taking cardiac medications, undergoing medical procedures, and making lifestyle changes.

Lifestyle Changes: Choosing healthy foods & drinks, maintaining a healthy weight, and getting regular exercise are key to keeping your heart healthy. You may also need to limit your alcohol consumption and quit smoking. If you have medical conditions that may worsen heart disease, management of these conditions will be a part of your treatment.

Medications: Lifestyle changes may need to be combined with medications to that will help to control your heart disease. The type of medication you are prescribed will depend on the type and severity of your disease.

Surgery or Medical Procedures: Depending on the type and severity of your disease, your doctor may recommend certain medical procedures to repair the damage to your heart.