

# Know the facts about heart disease

Understanding what heart disease is – and the issues it can cause – can empower you to protect your heart and stay healthy



## What is heart disease?

Simply put, heart disease prevents the heart from pumping blood to your organs the way it should. It can cause serious health issues, including heart attack, stroke, heart failure, or cardiac arrest. Nearly half of all adults in the United States have some form of heart disease.\* The good news is that most heart disease-related conditions can be prevented with the right lifestyle choices.

## What are the symptoms of heart disease?

Heart disease symptoms aren't always obvious. Sometimes, there might not be any symptoms of heart disease at all, until it causes a bigger issue. However, common signs include chest pain, a fast or irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, a pressure or squeezing feeling in the shoulders, neck, jaw, throat, or back, or nausea and vomiting. If you're experiencing these symptoms, your doctor can run tests to tell you if heart disease is the cause.

## What major problems can untreated heart disease cause?

	Heart attack	Stroke	Cardiac arrest	Heart failure
Definition	The heart doesn't get enough blood, often because of a buildup in the arteries	The brain doesn't get enough blood or a blood vessel in the brain bursts, which can kill brain cells	The heart stops beating, so other organs don't get the blood they need	The heart doesn't pump as much blood as the body needs to function normally
Symptoms	Chest pain or discomfort, heartburn, shortness of breath, feeling weak, light-headed, or faint, pain in the jaw, neck, back, or shoulders	Sudden onset of any of the following: numbness or weakness in face, arm, or leg, trouble speaking, seeing, or walking, severe headache	Not breathing or gasping for air, unresponsiveness	Shortness of breath, trouble breathing when lying down, weight gain or swelling in feet, ankles, and stomach, feeling tired or weak
Treatment	Must be treated immediately	Must be treated immediately	Must be treated immediately	Often a chronic condition, with many treatment options to improve symptoms

You should always go to the emergency room (ER) or call 911 if you think you're having a life-threatening emergency.





## Healthy heart checklist

Although the triggers for every heart condition are different, there are some common factors that increase the risk of heart disease and heart problems, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and obesity. Fortunately, healthy lifestyle changes can help.

- Don't smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Eat a diet focused on whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, and lean proteins.
- Eat foods high in saturated and trans fats, sodium, cholesterol, and added sugar in moderation.
- Aim for at least 2 and a half hours of exercise a week, or 30 minutes a day for five days.
- Keep your blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol in healthy ranges.
- Find healthy ways to manage and reduce stress.

Learn more about heart health from the American Heart Association at [heart.org](https://www.heart.org).

## Take it to heart

Talk to your doctor about making healthy lifestyle changes to help reduce your risk for heart disease. If you'd like help finding a new doctor, use the **Find Care** feature at [anthem.com](https://www.anthem.com).

\* American Heart Association: *Cardiovascular Diseases Affect Nearly Half of Americans* (accessed January 2022): [heart.org/en/news/2019/01/31/cardiovascular-diseases-affect-nearly-half-of-american-adults-statistics-show](https://www.heart.org/en/news/2019/01/31/cardiovascular-diseases-affect-nearly-half-of-american-adults-statistics-show)

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)  
American Heart Association: [heart.org](https://www.heart.org)

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