

High blood cholesterol is one of the major risk factors for heart disease. When there is too much cholesterol in your blood, it builds up in the walls of your arteries. Over time, this causes “hardening of the arteries” so that arteries become narrowed and blood flow to the heart is slowed down or blocked. This can cause a heart attack.

### **SIGNS OF HIGH CHOLESTEROL:**

High cholesterol rarely gives warning signs, so it is hard to know if you have it without a blood test. People over age 40 should have their cholesterol levels checked regularly by their doctor.

### **PREVENT HEART DISEASE:**

Heart disease is preventable! By making simple changes in your diet and exercise, you can reduce your chances of heart disease.

- Increase physical activity—exercise (even if it is just walking) for 30 minutes at least 3 times per week

- Avoid smoking or being around people who are smoking
- Reduce stress
- Limit alcoholic drinks
- Don't get too fat
- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables

### **For more information about heart disease on the Internet, please visit:**

American Heart Association  
[www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

National Stroke Association  
[www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture  
[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)



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*National Stroke Association*

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## **Heart Disease**



**[www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)**

*Protecting Refugees, Serving Immigrants,  
Upholding Freedom since 1911*

### WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

Heart disease is a condition in which oxygen- and nutrient-rich blood does not reach the heart. This could lead to a heart attack, stroke, or even death.

### WHAT IS A HEART ATTACK?

The heart works 24 hours a day, pumping oxygen- and nutrient-rich blood through the body. Blood is supplied to the heart through arteries. When people eat unhealthy food and do not exercise, fat builds up in the arteries. The fatty buildup or plaque can break open and lead to a blood clot. This is bad for the heart because blood clots reduce blood flow to the heart and will cause a heart attack.

### SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK:

- Pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes or that goes away and comes back
- Pain in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach
- Shortness of breath (difficulty breathing, catching your breath) with or without chest pain
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or feeling faint

Women experience the same symptoms as men, but women are more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

### WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU ARE HAVING A HEART ATTACK?

Go to a telephone and dial 911 immediately.

Do not wait. Find a way to get to a hospital right away. If you are having a heart attack, do not try to drive yourself to the hospital.

### WHAT IS A STROKE?

A stroke happens when a blood vessel that brings oxygen and nutrients to the brain explodes, or is blocked by a blood clot or some other solid. When this happens, part of the brain doesn't get the blood and oxygen it needs. This is called a stroke. When oxygen does not reach the brain, nerve cells die quickly. The result is permanent brain damage. The part of the body the damaged cells control stops working when the nerve cells die.

### SIGNS OF A STROKE:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Trouble speaking or understanding
- Trouble seeing with one eye or both eyes
- Trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

### WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU ARE HAVING A STROKE?

Go to a telephone and dial 911 immediately. Do not wait. Find a way to get to a hospital right away. If you are having a stroke, do not try to drive yourself to the hospital. Note what time the symptoms of the stroke first appeared. Treatment with stroke medications may reduce the long-term effects of a stroke.

## HYPERTENSION OR HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

### WHAT IS BLOOD PRESSURE?

Each time the heart beats, it pumps blood into the arteries. Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. "High" blood pressure, or hypertension, is when the force is too high, indicating your heart is working too hard. You cannot feel your heart working harder, but hypertension can be a very serious and deadly disease. Without treatment, high blood pressure may cause:

- Heart failure
- Kidney failure
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Vision changes and blindness

### SIGNS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE:

There are no warning signs of high blood pressure. Because of this, it is often called "the silent killer." High blood pressure can be treated and controlled with a healthy diet and regular exercise. Have your blood pressure tested to find out if you may be at risk for or suffering from high blood pressure.

### WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a soft, fat-like substance found in the blood. It's normal to have cholesterol because it's used for creating cells that help our body function. Too much cholesterol can lead to heart disease, however, which may lead to heart attacks.