

# Heart Health

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Across all racial and ethnic groups, cardiovascular disease is the nation's leading killer and a leading cause of disability. Cardiovascular disease refers to a variety of diseases and conditions affecting the heart and blood vessels, such as heart attack, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, and stroke. In 2004, more than 35% of all Wisconsin deaths (16,087) were due to Cardiovascular Disease. This includes 7,671 deaths due to coronary (ischemic) heart disease, 1,472 to congestive heart failure, and 3,064 to stroke.

## Heart Disease

Coronary heart disease is the result of a long-term process called atherosclerosis, which is the build-up of fatty deposits (plaque) on the interior walls of the arteries (large blood vessels). As plaque develops, the interior of the artery narrows and blood flow is reduced. When this happens in the coronary (heart) arteries, it can lead to a type of chest pain (angina pectoris).

A healthy artery is smooth, but plaque makes the artery rough and bumpy. A tear in the plaque can cause a blood clot to form, which can block the flow of blood to the heart muscle, and lead to a heart attack.

### Signs and Symptoms:

- Chest pain (crushing, squeezing)
- Sweating
- Shortness of breath
- Pain radiating to arm, neck, jaw
- Nausea, vomiting
- Dizziness

## Stroke

The process of plaque build-up in the arteries can occur anywhere in the body. If there is blockage or a clot in the neck or head arteries, it can block the flow of blood to the brain. This can lead to a "brain attack," or stroke. A stroke occurs when the blood supply is altered, and the brain tissue is starved of blood.

### Signs and Symptoms:

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg on one side of the body
- Sudden dimness, blurring, or loss of sight
- Loss of speech, or trouble talking or understanding speech
- Sudden severe headache
- Unexplained dizziness
- Unsteadiness or a sudden fall

### How you can help prevent heart disease and stroke:

- Don't smoke. If you smoke, try to quit.
- Get your cholesterol tested. If it's high (above 200), talk to your doctor or nurse about losing weight (if you're overweight) and getting more active. Ask if there's medicine that may help.
- Know your blood pressure. If it is high, talk to your doctor about how to lower it.
- Get tested for diabetes. If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar levels in check! This is the BEST way for you to take care of yourself and your heart.
- Eat heart-healthy foods: wholegrain foods, vegetables, fruits, lean meats and low-fat cheese and dairy products. Limit foods that have lots of saturated fat, like butter, whole milk, baked goods, ice cream, and fatty meals.
- Keep a healthy weight.
- Eat less salt. Use spices, herbs, lemon, and lime instead of salt.
- If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one drink per day.
- Get moving! Get at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days, if not all days, of the week.
- Take your medicine. If your doctor has prescribed medicine to help you, take it exactly as you have been told to.

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### For more information:

American Heart Association, (800) AHA-USA-1, [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

Wisconsin Cardiovascular Health Program, (608) 266-3702, [dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/cardiovascular/](http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/health/cardiovascular/)