

Health & Fitness Tips

Heart Disease

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death and disability in Australia, with men more likely to be affected than women. A 40 year old male in Australia has a 1 in 2 risk of developing coronary heart disease and female a 1 in 3 risk.

What causes heart disease?

In most cases, coronary heart disease occurs when fatty material containing cholesterol builds up on the inner walls of the arteries forming 'plaques', which gradually clog the arteries that supply oxygen to the heart. Coronary heart disease can lead to heart attack (when the artery is completely blocked and a part of the heart muscle dies), angina (the pain felt when the artery is partially blocked and there is reduced oxygen supply to the heart muscle), heart failure and stroke.



Are you at risk?

Many of the risk factors for heart disease are preventable. Identifying these risks and making lifestyle changes to address them can significantly reduce the chances of developing heart disease.

Risk factors you can't change include:

- Increasing age
- Having a family history of early death from heart disease

Risk factors you can control include:

- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Physical inactivity
- High blood cholesterol
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Depression, social isolation and lack of social support

What you can do

- Stop smoking: this is the single most important thing you can do to reduce the risk of heart disease.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Be physically active.
- Keep your blood cholesterol low.
- If you have diabetes, ensure it's controlled.
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly.

The key to a healthy heart is making simple lifestyle changes that are easy to maintain. Eat plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and grain-based products, and choose low-fat dairy foods. Opt for lean meat and chicken (with skin removed) and eat fish at least twice a week. Limit saturated fats, choosing monounsaturated olive or canola oils and margarines, avocados and nuts. Eat smaller portions, but don't forget to eat regularly. Include at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on all or most days of the week, but pick something you can enjoy, as you are more likely to stick to it.