

# Factors Driving Heart Disease

**W**hat are the secrets of long life without the fear of heart disease? A major global study showed that smoking and high blood pressure are the most important factors driving the risk of developing heart disease. Along with high cholesterol, overweight and diabetes are the five factors account for about 50% of the burden of cardiovascular disease.

The study was published in New England Journal of Medicine, which combined data from more than 2 million people in 39 countries on six continents. Researchers estimated their lifetime risk of developing cardiovascular disease and death from any cause up to 90 years of age, based on whether they had or did not have each of the five factors mentioned above.

Compared to people with all five risk factors at age 50, those who had none of these factors were much less likely to develop cardiovascular disease or die early. On an average, women with none of the risk factors at midlife, live 13 years more without heart disease while men live another additional 11 years.

As for overall survival, women without these five risk factors lived about 14 1/2 years longer while men gained nearly 12 extra years.

**RISK MANAGEMENT** Often all of these five risk factors occur together. It is not a surprise that presence of multiple risk factors significantly increase the risk. Among these factors, fewer than 9% of the Americans, age 65 and older are smokers . All of the other risk factors tend to become more prevalent as people age.

On the other hand, younger people get most benefit from modifying the risk factors. If you reach the age of 50 and have a number of these risk factors, it is all the more important for you to make changes to reduce the risk because of the huge impact it can have on how long you live. The study suggested that high blood pressure has the greatest impact.

Among people between the ages of 55 and 59 with all five risk factors, lowering the blood pressure to a healthy range was linked to the greatest increase in the number of years free from heart disease.

About 70% of all people older than 65 have high blood pressure, but only about 15 to 20% have it under control. Unfortunately, as much as 50% of all people with high blood pressure are no longer taking their blood pressure medications as prescribed. Normal blood pressure is 120/80 and the blood pressure guidelines define high blood pressure as a reading of 130/80 or higher.

Your body weight or your cholesterol values can be measured quite precisely with a single reading. However, your blood pressure is different. It fluctuates quite a bit. Your blood pressure can be affected by so many different factors such as how much coffee you drink, whether you are under stress, how much alcohol you consume and so on.

Because of anxiety when you go to your doctor's office where blood pressure is often elevated, it is often difficult for your doctor to say that you definitely have high blood pressure or not. Often it will be helpful to have your blood pressure checked two or three times during your office visit.

It is a good practice for you to take deep breaths in and out for 5-10 minutes when you're sitting in your doctor's waiting room to calm yourself down. This also applies when you are sitting on the examination table while waiting for the doctor to come in. On the other hand, it's always a good practice to start monitoring your blood pressure at home.

If your blood pressure is even borderline elevated, it should be a wake up call for you to talk to your doctor about what you can do to lower it.

Some of the strategies include healthy eating habits, decreasing the salt intake, limiting or eliminating alcohol intake, exercise regularly, sleeping at least 7 to 8 hours at night and managing your stress with meditation and relaxation techniques suggest as yoga.

Good Luck to you all- For those of you who read this and to to those who don't read.

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