

# SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

## CARDIAC HEALTH

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both women and men in the United States. In 2020, nearly 700,000 people died due to heart disease as a leading factor, which is almost 100,000 more than the next highest factor, cancer. Therefore, it's important to take this aspect of your health seriously.

**Controllable Risk Factors:** These are things that can be avoided or that you have some measure of control over, as opposed to uncontrollable factors such as age or family history. These can include:

- ❖ **Smoking.** Smokers are more than *twice as likely* to have a heart attack than non-smokers. Smoking increases blood pressure and heart rate, and narrows blood vessels.
- ❖ **High blood pressure.** The heart has to work harder when a person has high blood pressure. Over time, the heart enlarges and gets weaker, creating stress on the heart muscle.
- ❖ **High cholesterol.** A diet high in cholesterol and/or fat often causes atherosclerosis (a condition when plaque builds up along the walls of the arteries). Blood clots are more likely to form in these narrowed arteries and cause a heart attack.
- ❖ **Obesity.** People who are more than 20 percent over their ideal body weight have an increased risk of a heart attack. Being overweight increases the workload on the heart and arteries.
- ❖ **Sedentary lifestyle.** Lack of exercise can increase cholesterol levels and weight.



- ❖ **Stress.** Anxiety and tension can trigger angina and other heart problems in some people.
- ❖ **Uncontrolled diabetes.** Diabetes affects the amount of cholesterol in the body. Studies show that heart or blood vessel disease is the cause of death in more than 80 percent of diabetics.

The following are some ways to reduce your risk and improve cardiac health:

- ❖ Maintain a healthy diet low in fat and refined sugar and high in fruits and vegetables (at least five servings a day) and fiber
- ❖ Exercise throughout the week (at least 30 minutes four or five times a week)
- ❖ Take measures to lower high blood pressure with diet and exercise, or medication if necessary
- ❖ Practice stress management and relaxation techniques (meditation, yoga, keep a regular and adequate sleep schedule, etc.)
- ❖ Quit smoking
- ❖ Those with diabetes should monitor their blood sugar and consult their doctor on a regular basis to help keep it under control

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