

Cardiovascular health

What is cardiovascular disease?

Cardiovascular disease is the general term used to include diseases of the heart (cardio) and of the blood vessels (veins and arteries). While most cardiovascular diseases involve the heart, conditions such as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), involve blood supply to other parts of the body, such as the legs and brain.

Cardiovascular disease tends to develop over time but here are some important facts:

- ♥ Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Australian women
- ♥ Women are 4 times more likely to die from heart disease than breast cancer

Types of cardiovascular disease

Aneurysm

A widening or bulge in an artery or vein that can burst.

Angina

Discomfort or chest pain caused by lack of blood flow and oxygen to the heart muscle.

Atherosclerosis

The gradual build-up of fatty deposits, (plaque), on the inner walls of the arteries. It causes arteries to narrow resulting in reduced blood flow to the heart and other organs. It can cause angina, heart attack and stroke.

Coronary heart disease

When atherosclerosis affects the arteries of the heart it is called coronary heart disease.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

Occurs when a clot forms in a vein situated deep in the body.

Heart attack

Occurs when an artery to the heart becomes completely blocked and blood flow is stopped to part of the heart muscle.

Know the symptoms of heart attack in women

Women can feel pain in the centre of the chest when having a heart attack, but not always. Rather than the chest pain men often feel, women may experience breathlessness, nausea, back pain, tightness or discomfort in the arms, shortness of breath and a general feeling of being unwell. If you experience one or a combination of these symptoms, and they progressively get worse for at least 10 minutes, it is important to tell someone. Call 000 without delay.

High blood pressure

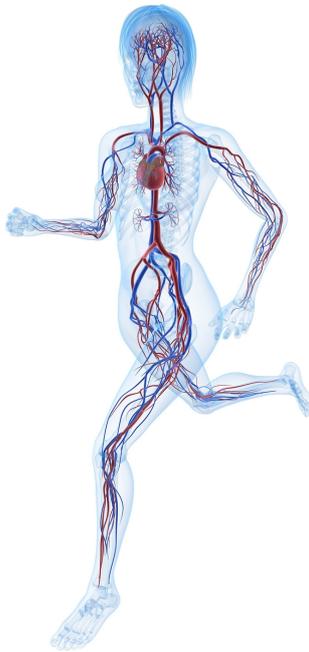
Continuously high blood pressure can damage arteries, the heart and other organs and adds to the risk of having a heart attack and stroke.

Stroke

If an artery to the brain becomes blocked, or brain blood vessels bleed, severe loss of blood and damage to that part of the brain may cause loss of consciousness, weakness, numbness, paralysis, dizziness, loss of balance, blurred or decreased vision, and difficulty in speaking or understanding.

Causes of cardiovascular disease

Causes can be related to lifestyle, like being overweight, lack of physical activity, poor nutrition and smoking. Some causes such as a family history of heart disease can't be changed and some causes are lesser known, such as depression and feeling isolated.



What can you do for cardiovascular health?

The way to prevent cardiovascular disease is to do something about the causes that put you at risk.

- Know and understand your blood pressure numbers – get regular checks
- Know and understand your cholesterol levels – get regular checks
- Try a diet rich in vegetables, fruit, low fat dairy foods, nuts, wholegrains, fish, chicken and lean meat, keeping saturated fats and salt to a minimum (eg the DASH diet) – this type of diet can help reduce blood pressure

- Soluble fibre is important in lowering LDL cholesterol, so include foods such as rolled oats, muesli, oat and rice bran, barley, legumes, fruit and vegetables
- Plant sterols lower cholesterol levels by stopping the absorption of cholesterol from the gut – they are found naturally in vegetable oils and most plant foods but are also in products such as spreads (eg Pro-Activ®) and milks (eg HeartActive®)
- Aim for 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days
- It is recommended people with high blood pressure don't have more than 2 standard alcoholic drinks per day
- Take steps to manage your weight if you are above a healthy weight
- Depression and diabetes have been linked to cardiovascular disease so it is important to manage these conditions
- Some medications will help to lower cholesterol and manage high blood pressure – discuss medications with your doctor
- A doctor is your best source of information. Referral to other accredited health practitioners may also help:
 - Cardiologists to test and monitor your heart
 - Dietitians to help with weight management and healthy eating
 - Psychologists if you have feelings of depression or loneliness
 - Exercise physiologists to help identify the right physical activity for your age and lifestyle
 - Naturopaths for advice about supplements and vitamins

For more information go to jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/cardiovascular-health

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner. References are available on request.

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