

The Faces of Cardiovascular Disease in America



Who Does Heart Disease Affect, and How?

In one way or another, cardiovascular disease affects all Americans. It may affect you, a family member, or a friend. But if you think you are not at risk for heart disease because you don't fit the stereotype of an older man experiencing a massive heart attack, like we often see portrayed on TV, then you may have a false sense of security.

Read on to find out more about who is at risk for heart disease in America. Then please use SecondsCount.org and other resources to learn more about **risk factors for heart disease, what you can do about them, symptoms to be on the alert for, and what to do if they strike.**

Men and Women

- **Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States.** In 2006, heart disease caused 26 percent of deaths—that's more than 1 person out of every 4 people.
- Although heart disease is sometimes thought of as a "man's disease," **around the same number of women and men die each year of heart disease** in the United States. Unfortunately, 36 percent of women did not perceive themselves to be at risk for heart disease in a 2005 survey. But [heart disease does indeed affect women.](#)
- **Half of the men and almost two-thirds of the women** who die suddenly of coronary artery disease have no previous [coronary artery disease warning signs.](#) **Even if you have no symptoms, you may still be at risk for heart disease.**
- **Coronary artery disease is the most common type of cardiovascular disease.** It affects the arteries in your heart, which build up with plaque and become narrow, decreasing the flow of blood to your heart. This is called [atherosclerosis](#), and can lead to chest pain or eventually a [heart attack.](#)

Old and Young

- **Heart disease can affect people of all ages.**
- **Generally, the risk of cardiovascular disease increases as you age.**
 - **For men, the risk starts to climb at about age 45**, when 1 out of every 100 men develop signs of heart disease. By age 55, the risk has doubled to about 2.1 out every 100 men. It continues to increase until, by age 85, about 7.4 out of every 100 men have cardiovascular disease.
 - **For women, the risk of cardiovascular disease also climbs with age**, but the trend begins about 10 years later than in men and especially with the onset of menopause.
- **More and more young people are affected by heart disease**, in part because diabetes and childhood obesity are on the rise. Obese youth are more likely to have **risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure**. In a population-based sample of 5- to 17-year-olds, 70 percent of obese youth had at least two risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

All Ethnicities—Some More at Risk than Others

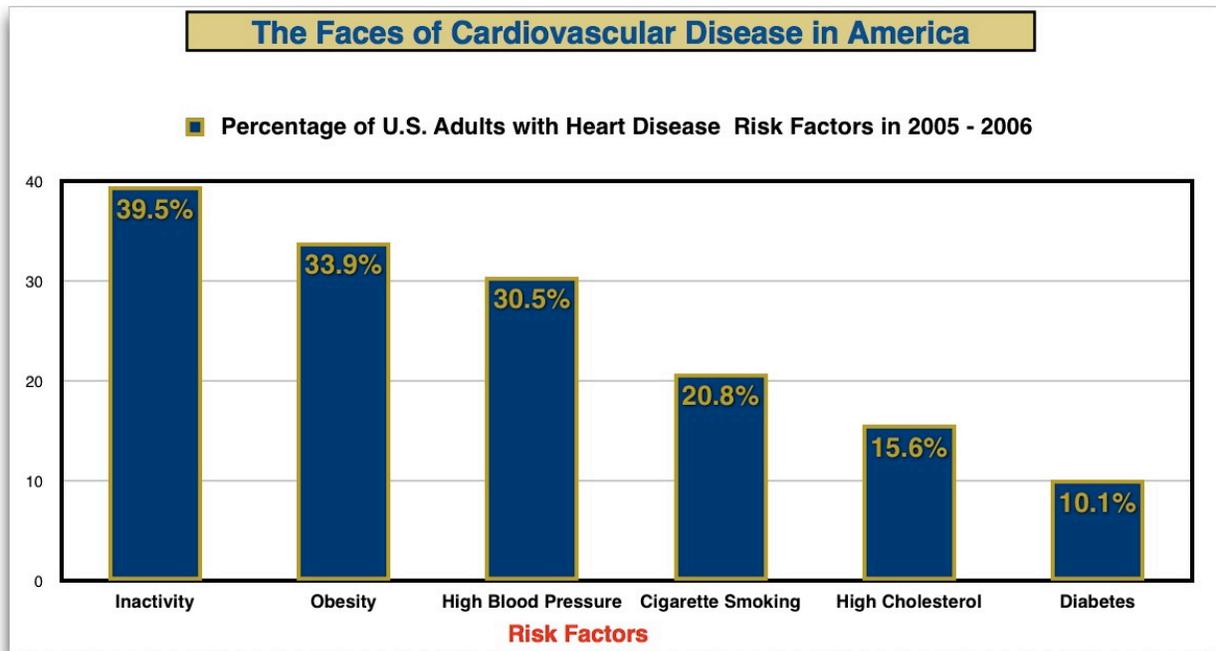
- According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), **heart disease and stroke are the leading cause of death in every ethnic group** studied—Caucasian, African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American—in the United States.
- According to the [American Heart Association](#), the **cardiovascular disease death rate among African Americans is 34 percent higher than for the overall U.S. population**.
- According to the [Women's Heart Foundation](#), **African American women ages 55 to 64 are twice as likely as caucasian women to have a heart attack** and 35 percent more likely to suffer from coronary artery disease.

All Socioeconomic Levels—Some More at Risk than Others

- **Lower socioeconomic status is associated with an increase of chronic stress, which may lead to heart problems.** [Stress management](#) is important for everyone.
- Lower socioeconomic status is also linked to a diet high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and carbohydrates, as well as to poorer access to healthcare and health insurance. While healthcare and insurance access may not always be in our control, many things are—such as eating a [heart-healthy diet](#) and [being more physically active](#).

Americans with Heart Disease Risk Factors

Many Americans are at risk for heart disease due to the risk factors in the following chart. In fact, 37 percent of Americans reported having two or more of these risk factors in 2003. But the good news is that many of these **risk factors are modifiable**, meaning you can **lower your risk for heart disease with several lifestyle changes**.



Physical inactivity and obesity are the two risk factors affecting the most Americans. So, getting more **physical activity** and eating a balanced **heart-healthy diet** might be a good starting place for most Americans. It's not always easy to change your lifestyle, but **Seconds Count can help you get started today!**

Sources:

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<http://cdc.gov/heartdisease/>

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