What South Asian Americans need to know about heart disease

Heart disease. Are you at risk?
Increase your knowledge about heart disease.

Be proactive about your heart health.

You owe it to yourself and your loved ones.

Heart disease among South Asians* strikes early, strikes hard, and strikes unexpectedly.¹

Any one of us could be at risk without knowing it.

**Did you know?**

The heart disease rate among South Asians living in America is three to four times higher than that of the general population.¹

- Coronary artery disease (CAD) tends to occur earlier in life and in a higher percentage of the population in South Asians than in other ethnic groups.²
- Approximately one-third of all first heart attacks among South Asians occur in those younger than 45 and these South Asians¹ heart disease is often comparable in severity to that of older South Asians.¹
- Among South Asians living in the U.S., South Asian women have the highest CAD mortality—30% higher than whites and 325% higher than Chinese.³
- Vegetarian and non-vegetarian South Asians have similarly high rates of heart disease.¹
- Diabetes is 2 to 4 times more common among South Asians in the US than other Americans. It occurs at a younger age, and even in the absence of obesity.¹

* South Asians are individuals whose ethnic roots originate from the Indian subcontinent, a large geographic area that includes India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
How can you tell if you are at risk?

Many different risk factors (conditions or lifestyle habits) can affect your chance of developing heart disease. It’s important to understand which risk factors affect you and what actions you can take to lower your risk of developing heart disease.

Check the designated boxes to the right if you answer “yes” to any of the risk factor questions.

### Risk factors you CAN’T control
- Increasing age
  - For men: are you over age 45?
  - For women: are you post-menopausal or over age 55?
- Heredity (including race)
  - Does anyone in your immediate family have a history of heart disease or diabetes?

### Risk factors you CAN control
- Do you have diabetes?
- Do you smoke?
- High blood pressure
  - Is your blood pressure 140/90 mmHg or higher? (Normal is below 120/80 mmHg)
- High cholesterol
  - Is your total cholesterol over 200?
- Obesity
  - Is your body mass index* above 23?
    - For South Asian men: is your waist measurement greater than 36 inches?
    - For South Asian women: is your waist measurement greater than 32 inches?
- Inactivity
  - Do you exercise less than three times a week?

* Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight that applies to both men and women.

Note: Recommendations for BMI and waist measurements are lower for Asians than the recommendations for Caucasians.

**Multiplier Effect:** Risk factors for heart disease

For each risk factor you checked “yes” to, your overall risk of developing heart disease skyrockets.

The risk factors don’t add their potential danger like one plus one equals two—they multiply it. For instance, if you have three risk factors, you are 10 times more likely to develop heart disease than a person with no risk factors.

Traditional heart disease factors are more harmful to South Asians than others. In heart disease terms, one cigarette smoked by a South Asian is equivalent to three smoked by a non-South Asian. A 10-pound weight gain by an Indian equals 30 pounds gained by others.

For the risk factors you can control, it’s important you take action to minimize your risks. If you have some in the “can’t control” category, then it’s even more important that you take action on the risks you can control to help reduce your overall risk for heart disease.
Every 39 seconds, an American dies of heart disease.⁶

**Terms you need to know.**

**Coronary artery disease (CAD)** is the narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries, the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart itself. It happens slowly over time. CAD is the most common cause of heart disease.⁷

**Blood pressure** is the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your arteries. A blood pressure reading below 120/80 mmHg is considered normal.

**High blood pressure** (also known as hypertension) is a blood pressure reading of 140/90 mmHg or higher. High blood pressure is dangerous because it makes your heart work too hard, putting you at serious risk for heart disease and stroke.

**Sudden cardiac arrest** is when the heart suddenly and abruptly stops beating. Sudden cardiac arrest is not the same as a heart attack. Sudden cardiac arrest occurs when electrical problems in the heart cause a dangerously fast heart rate.

A **heart attack** is different. It results from damage to the heart muscle caused by blood flow blockage, rather than an electrical problem.

**Heart failure** does not mean the heart suddenly stops working. “Failure” means that the heart is not able to pump enough blood and oxygen to meet your body’s needs.
Questions you can ask your doctor

- Do I have heart disease?
- What tests should I have, and how often, to monitor my risk factors for developing heart disease or stroke?
- Are my blood pressure numbers within a normal range?
- Are my cholesterol numbers within a normal range?
- What sort of plan do you recommend for me to lower my risk?
- Can you help me plan a safe weight loss and exercise program?
- What are the possible side effects of the medications I’ve been prescribed?

Visit your doctor regularly.

Nothing replaces a discussion with your doctor or health care provider.

Talk to your doctor about your risk factors—choose two to three questions most relevant to you and write down the answers.

Being honest about your risk factors will get you the most realistic assessment and help your doctor develop a plan to lower your overall risk.
Close the Gap
www.your-heart-health.com

To learn more about your personal risk for developing heart disease, you can search the Internet for information to discuss with your doctor. Sites to consider include:

The American Heart Association
heart.org
goredforwomen.org
Cardiovascular Research Foundation
hearthealthywomen.org
Coronary Artery Disease Among Asian Indians (CADI) Research Foundation
cadiresearch.com
The Heart Truth Campaign for Women
hearttruth.gov
LifeBeat Online
lifebeatonline.com
Medline Plus
nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/
heartdiseases.html
The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
nhlbi.nih.gov
The Office of Minority Health
minorityhealth.hhs.gov
The South Asian Heart Center
southasianheartcenter.org
Sudden Cardiac Arrest Association
suddencardiacarrest.org
WomenHeart
womenheart.org
WebMD
webmd.com

Take charge of your heart health. Here are some tips to get you started.

Don’t smoke and avoid secondhand smoke.7
People who smoke are up to six times more likely to suffer a heart attack than non-smokers. If you smoke, QUIT!

Aim for a healthy weight.8
Even though South Asians are 30 pounds lighter than the general American population, they are more likely to have heart disease and diabetes.

Get moving.7
Make a commitment to be more physically active. Every day, aim for 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity such as taking a brisk walk, raking, dancing, light-weight lifting, house cleaning, or gardening.
Every day, aim for 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity such as taking a brisk walk.

**Eat for heart health.**
Choose a diet low in saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, and cholesterol. Be sure to include whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.

**Know your numbers.**
Ask your doctor to check your blood pressure, cholesterol (total, HDL, LDL, and triglycerides), and blood glucose. Work with your doctor to manage your numbers.

*Please note: this information is not a substitute for medical care. As always, you should consult your doctor or health care provider.*