

What is heart disease?

Heart disease refers to a number of serious diseases affecting heart health. As the biggest cause of deaths worldwide, heart disease is a widespread health problem. Find out more about who's at risk, symptoms to look out for and facts about the most common type of heart disease – coronary heart disease.



About heart disease

Heart disease is a name for a group of serious conditions that affect the health of your heart or circulation. It can also be called cardiovascular disease. While some types of heart disease depend on genetic or family factors, many conditions can be prevented by living a healthier lifestyle.

According to British Heart Foundation, heart disease affects 7.4 million people living in the UK and it accounts for one death every three minutes.

Heart disease also covers conditions that affect your heart's muscle, valves or cause abnormal rhythms (arrhythmias).

Symptoms of heart disease

If you experience any of the following symptoms, you should seek medical help, as they could indicate the onset of cardiovascular heart disease.

- Chest pain
- Painful, weak or numb limbs
- Feeling out of breath
- Heart palpitations, or a slow or fast heartbeat
- Fatigue
- Dizziness

What increases your risk of cardiovascular heart disease?

Your family history, ethnic background, sex and age all play a part in your chances of developing cardiovascular heart disease (CVD). More men tend to get coronary heart disease, and your risk increases with age.

Other risk factors, including some lifestyle and preventable contributors are:

- high blood pressure
- being overweight
- diabetes
- smoking
- high cholesterol
- inactive lifestyle

Coronary heart disease

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is one of the most common kinds of heart disease. Also known as ischaemic heart disease, CHD is the most frequent cause of heart attacks and the single biggest cause of worldwide deaths, according to the British Heart Foundation.

The disease is caused by a build-up of fatty deposits in your coronary arteries, which supply blood to your heart. When these arteries become furred up with fatty substances, they narrow, in a process called atherosclerosis. Narrowed arteries slow down the flow of blood to your heart and can cause chest pain, or angina.

Blocking of coronary arteries can lead to serious consequences for your health. If a piece of atheroma breaks off and blocks a coronary artery, it causes a heart attack.

About heart attacks

The majority of heart attacks are caused by coronary heart disease. A blood clot can partially or fully block one of your coronary arteries, resulting in your heart muscle not receiving enough or any oxygen and blood.

A heart attack is a medical emergency and you should not delay in calling 999 if you think you are having one.

Other heart diseases

While coronary heart disease is by far the most common kind, there are several other types of heart disease.

Arrhythmia

Arrhythmia is abnormal heart rhythm. It includes conditions where your heart beats too fast, like tachycardia or too slowly, in the case of bradycardia. It can be a symptom of coronary heart disease, or cardiomyopathy, which is a disease affecting the heart's muscle.

Peripheral arterial disease

Peripheral arterial disease is when there's a blockage in the arteries supplying the limbs with blood, normally the legs.

Aortic disease

The aorta is the largest blood vessel in the body, which carries blood from the heart around the body. One of the most serious aortic diseases is known as aortic aneurysm, which is potentially life-threatening.



CVD is one of the main causes of death and disability in the UK, but it can often largely be prevented by leading a healthy lifestyle.

NHS website