



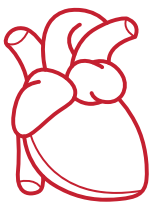
# CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND ATHEROSCLEROSIS

Know the facts

## What is cardiovascular disease?

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) refers to all the diseases of the heart and circulation, including coronary heart disease, atrial fibrillation, heart attack, congenital heart disease and stroke.

A major cause of CVD is atherosclerosis.



*Cardiovascular disease is the world's number one killer*

## What is atherosclerosis?

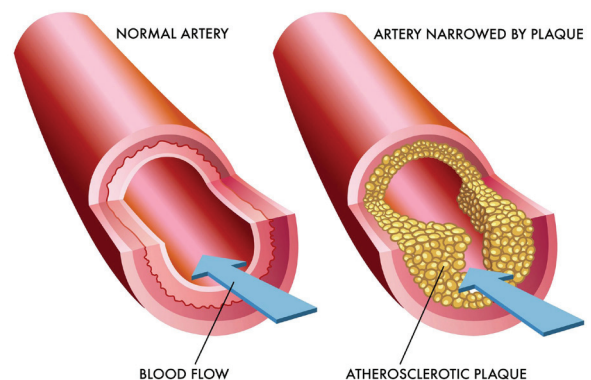
Atherosclerosis is a disease process in which fatty deposits (known as plaques) build up in the walls of arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood from the heart throughout the body). These plaques are made up of cholesterol, fatty substances, cellular waste products, calcium and fibrin (a clotting material in the blood).

Over time, plaques can continue to develop size and harden, narrowing arteries and

restricting the blood flow. These fatty plaques can also break open (rupture), triggering potent clot formation (thrombosis) that can further limit, or even block, the flow of oxygen-rich blood to organs and other parts of the body.

Atherosclerosis can occur in arteries anywhere in the body, but is most serious when it leads to a reduced or blocked blood supply to the heart or to the brain. If it occurs in one of the two main coronary arteries that supply blood to the heart, this results in a heart attack. When thrombosis occurs in one of the arteries to the brain, it causes a stroke. If it occurs in arteries in the limbs, it can lead to peripheral artery disease.

### ATHEROSCLEROSIS



## What are the risk factors and what can you do?

Much of the burden caused by CVD is preventable. While the exact cause of atherosclerosis is not known, it is linked to certain risk factors.

Risk factors beyond our control include age, gender, family history and ethnicity.

However, simple lifestyle changes can help manage or prevent the following major modifiable risk factors:

### Excessive alcohol

- Excessive alcohol intake is linked to many chronic conditions such as CVD, as well as other risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

### Depression and stress

- People with depression, who are socially isolated or who lack a good support network can be at greater risk of developing CVD. High stress levels can also increase risk.

### Diabetes

- People with diabetes are over twice as likely to develop CVD as those without, while people with CVD are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes.

### High blood pressure

- High blood pressure means that blood is pumping with more force than normal through the arteries. This can speed up clogging of the arteries with fatty plaques (atherosclerosis).

### High cholesterol

- When there is too much cholesterol in the body, it builds up in the walls of the arteries,

making it harder for blood to flow through. The main cause is eating foods high in saturated and trans fats.

### Inactivity

- Regular physical activity helps to control other risk factors for CVD, such as high blood pressure and cholesterol, and being overweight. It can also be good for mood, and mental and overall physical health.

### Obesity

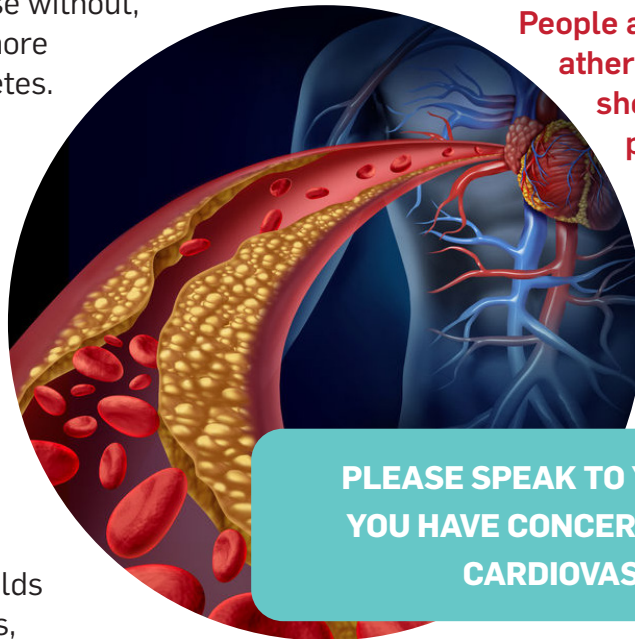
- Being overweight or obese puts extra strain on the body and heart, increasing risk of a range of health problems, including CVD.

### Poor nutrition

- The body – and the heart – needs a good range of vitamins, minerals and nutrients for proper functioning.

### Smoking

- Smoking damages the arteries that supply blood to your heart and body. It increases your risk of heart attack, stroke and peripheral artery disease.



**People at risk of developing atherosclerosis should be tested if possible – early detection and the implementation of a management plan can help to prevent its progression.**

**PLEASE SPEAK TO YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH.**




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