



## CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE RISK FACTORS

### Risk factors that you cannot change include:

- Age
- Family history of heart disease
- Male gender

### Risk factors that you can change or impact include:

- **Smoking:** Since smoking can increase the risk of heart disease by 3 - 4 times, it is the most important risk factor that you can change.
- **Diabetes:** Diabetes, particularly if blood sugars levels are not well controlled, can put you at a greater risk for heart disease. If you have diabetes, it is very important to follow your blood sugar levels closely.
- **Obesity:** Having excess body fat is related to diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol levels. Achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight is an important goal in lowering your risk for cardiovascular disease.
- **Total cholesterol:** Total cholesterol is the sum of all the cholesterol in your blood. The higher your total cholesterol, the greater your risk for heart disease. Important total cholesterol numbers:
  - Less than 200 mg/dL *Desirable* level that puts you at lower risk for heart disease.
  - 200 to 239 mg/dL *Borderline-high*. A cholesterol level of 200 mg/dL or greater increases your risk.
  - 240 mg/dL and above *High* cholesterol. A person with this level has a higher risk of heart disease compared to someone whose cholesterol is below 200 mg/dL.
- **HDL cholesterol:** High-density lipoprotein (HDL) is the good cholesterol. HDL has been shown to be protective in reducing the risk for heart disease and possibly stroke. Important HDL numbers:
  - Less than 40 mg/dL...a risk factor for heart disease
  - 40 to 59 mg/dL...normal range values.
  - 60 mg/dL and above...considered possibly protective against heart disease.
- **Blood pressure:** High blood pressure can increase your risk of developing heart disease and stroke. Have your blood pressure checked regularly. If you are told you have high blood pressure, make sure you follow up and work to treat it. *Systolic blood pressure* is the first number of your blood pressure reading. *Diastolic blood pressure* is the second number. For example, if your blood pressure reading is 140/80 (140 over 80), your systolic blood pressure is 140, and your diastolic blood pressure is 80.
- **Exercise:** A sedentary lifestyle is related to diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and high cholesterol levels. Regular exercise is essential to control these risk factors.
- **Diet:** A diet rich in fatty foods can cause high cholesterol levels and obesity, and has been linked to diabetes and hypertension. Changing your diet can greatly impact your risk for developing heart disease.