



CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND SOUTH ASIANS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a term used for diseases of the heart and blood vessels that can lead to a number of illnesses, such as heart attacks, strokes, and high blood pressure.
- CVD is often more common among South Asians worldwide than among many other groups.
- South Asians in the United States have premature heart disease at three to four times the rates of other Americans.
- Rates of heart disease among South Asian women are as high as South Asian men in the U.S.
- While heart disease is generally thought of as a disease affecting an older population in the U.S., the occurrence of heart disease can be found among younger South Asians.¹

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

People experiencing these symptoms should seek medical care immediately.

- Chest pain (angina) or shortness of breath may be the earliest signs of CVD.
- Angina can feel like a heaviness, tightness, pain, burning, pressure, or squeezing sensation in the upper chest and can be associated with pain or numbness in the arms, neck, jaw, upper abdomen, or back.
- Women in particular may have symptoms of CVD that are described differently than in men (such as dizziness or fatigue).

RISK FACTORS

Some risk factors associated with increased risk for heart disease among South Asians are:²

- High cholesterol (note for those with diabetes or heart disease these levels will be different):

- Total cholesterol greater than 200 mg/dl;
- “Bad” cholesterol (LDL-C) more than 100 mg/dl; and/or
- “Good” cholesterol (HDL-C) less than 40 mg/dl for males and less than 50 mg/dl for females.
- Smoking tobacco (including cigarettes, bidis, and pipes) or using other forms of tobacco (including chewing tobacco).
- High blood pressure measured as follows:
 - Greater than 140/80 mm - possibly lower for those in certain risk groups (such as those with diabetes, etc.)
- Diabetes or high blood sugars.
- Obesity as measured by high body fat and/or weight circumference.
- Family history of heart disease.
- Not getting enough exercise or leading a less active lifestyle and/or more stressful lifestyle.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- If you smoke tobacco, quit smoking.
- If you use other tobacco products, stop doing so.
- Eat a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and eat fewer fried foods or foods cooked in ghee.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.

- Get more exercise at least 30 minutes per day at least 5 days per week.
- Get your cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar checked.
- If your cholesterol or blood pressure is high, lower your cholesterol with a healthier diet and more exercise, and ask your health care provider if you need medication(s).
- Get screened for diabetes; if you have diabetes, keep it well controlled.
- If you are overweight, work on losing weight.
- If you have a family history of heart disease, ask your health care provider about your own risk of heart disease.
- Visit with your health care provider on a regular basis.



RESOURCES

National

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

Phone: (800) 232-4636

Website: www.cdc.gov/heartdisease

California

Prevention and Awareness for South Asian Wellness Program – Palo Alto Medical Foundation

Phone: (650) 330-4523

Website: www.pamf.org/southasian

New York

South Asian Health Project

Phone: (800) 530-9821

Website:

www.southasianhealth.org/yourhealth/HH/hearthealthmainpage.aspx

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¹ Enas, E.A. and Kannan, S. (2005). "How to beat the heart disease epidemic among South Asians: A prevention and management guide for Asian Indians and their doctors." Chicago: Grace Printing.

² American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin. Available at: <http://aapiusa.org/resources/cad-cardio-metabolic-diseases.aspx>. Accessed 7 September 2010.

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