

What is heart disease?



Heart disease occurs when a fatty substance called plaque builds up on the walls inside your heart's coronary arteries, which supply blood to the heart. This buildup of plaque, which occurs over time, is called *atherosclerosis*, or hardening of the arteries. This can block the flow of blood to the heart.

Other names your healthcare provider may use for heart disease are:

- Coronary heart disease (CHD)
- Coronary artery disease (CAD)
- Cardiovascular disease (CVD)

What causes heart disease?

Two of the most common causes of heart disease are:

- **High cholesterol level.**
Cholesterol is a fatlike substance in your blood. Your body produces most of it. Some of it comes from the food you eat. There are two major kinds of cholesterol:
 - **“Bad” cholesterol**, called *LDL*. This is the main part of the plaque that can build up and block your arteries.
 - **“Good” cholesterol**, called *HDL*. This can help keep the bad cholesterol from building up in your arteries.
- **High blood pressure**, also called *HBP* or *hypertension*.
When your heart beats, it creates pressure to push blood through your arteries and veins. Arteries narrowed by plaque need more pressure to push blood through. High pressure can stretch out arteries. This can cause:
 - **Weak arteries.** Weakened arteries can burst in the brain and cause a stroke.
 - **Scarred arteries.** Stretched arteries can get tiny tears, which can cause scars. The tears and scars can catch and hold plaque, blood cells, and other substances in the blood.
 - **Blood clots.** Blood cells trapped by scars and tears in the arteries can form clots. Clots can break off and block other blood vessels and cause a heart attack or stroke.

Why is heart disease dangerous?

Heart disease can lead to:

- **Angina**, described as chest pain or squeezing or pressure in the chest. Chest pain occurs when narrowed coronary arteries do not allow enough blood to flow to your heart.
- **Heart attack**, also called *myocardial infarction*.
Heart attack occurs when a coronary artery becomes completely blocked so no blood can flow through it, and part of the heart muscle becomes damaged or dies.
- **Heart failure.**
This occurs when heart disease weakens the heart muscle. The weakened heart cannot pump out as much blood as your body needs.

Talk to your healthcare provider
about any questions
you may have about your heart.



Sticking With My Medicine — What Will Work?

Taking your lipid-lowering medicine(s) as directed by your healthcare provider is one of the most important things you can do to help manage high cholesterol or triglycerides.

Not taking your lipid-lowering medicine(s) as directed by your provider could mean:

- Your medicine may not work the way it should.
- You may increase your risk for serious health problems, like a heart attack or stroke.
- Your LDL (bad) cholesterol and triglyceride numbers may stay the same or go up; your HDL (good) cholesterol number may stay the same or go down.



“Taking medicine gets in the way of my day.”

Taking more than one medicine at different times each day can be hard. The key is to create a routine that fits your life.

- Try taking your medicine around the same time as other daily habits, such as in the morning when brushing your teeth or in the evening around dinnertime.
- Talk to your provider about the best time to take your medicine. Ask if your medicine should be taken with or without food.
- Ask your provider if there is a medicine you can take less often. A simpler medicine schedule may help you.

If you often forget to take your medicine:

- Use a pill box marked with the days of the week. Take it with you when you are away from home.
- Wear a watch. Set an alarm. Leave yourself a note on the bathroom mirror.
- Keep your medicine in a place where you will see it every day.

If you forget to refill your medicine on time:

- Write “refill medicine” on your calendar about a week before your medicine will run out.
- Make sure you have enough refills to last until your next provider visit.
- Ask your pharmacy to send you reminders to refill your prescription.

Work with your healthcare provider to find ways to take your lipid-lowering medicine(s) every day as directed.

