

## Heart Disease Striking at a Younger Age

(ARA) - Both during February American Heart Month and year-round, doctors are urging people to learn how to recognize and manage their risk of heart disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 910,000 Americans die of cardiovascular diseases every year, equivalent to one death every 35 seconds. Contrary to popular belief, it does not just affect people over 65 -- it is also on the rise in people ages 15 to 34.

“Because heart disease encompasses several heart-related ailments, the actual symptoms can vary widely,” says Marie Savard, M.D., an internationally recognized physician and medical advisor. “It is important to recognize symptoms such as feeling tired all the time, shortness of breath, having persistent cough or wheezing, and increased heart rate even when sitting still. These can all be possible indications of different forms of heart disease.”



Cholesterol is one major risk factor for the disease, so knowing your cholesterol level is important. A simple blood test can determine your level of HDL (the “good” cholesterol) and LDL (the “bad” cholesterol). If your bad cholesterol is high, your physician might recommend diet, exercise, or other treatment. Exercise, particularly aerobic exercises like biking, running, swimming or brisk walking, can increase the good cholesterol in the blood while also lowering the bad variety.

High blood pressure (also called hypertension), a condition that affects 1 in 4 Americans, can also increase the risk of heart disease. According to the American Heart Association, hypertension occurs when the systolic pressure (the blood pressure in the artery when the heart contracts) is 140 and above and the diastolic pressure (the pressure in the artery when the heart is at rest) is 90 and above. At this stage, your doctor may advise you to make some lifestyle changes, including limiting salt and fat in your diet, exercising, losing extra pounds, not smoking, and not drinking heavily. If these changes do not bring your blood pressure down enough, you and your doctor can discuss additional alternatives such as medication.

Dr. Savard recommends a proactive approach by taking a few key measures :

**Heart Health Risk Assessment** - Learn how your current lifestyle may affect the overall health of your heart

**Blood Pressure Tracker** - Charting fluctuations in your blood pressure may help you better manage this critical heart disease risk factor

**Cholesterol Tracker** - Track your cholesterol levels to help you and your doctor assess the positive impact of diet, exercise, medication and other cholesterol-lowering strategies

**BMI Calculator** - Determine your current Body Mass Index (BMI), one way to estimate overall body fat

To learn more about heart health or to receive free newsletters on Heart Disease, Hypertension or High Cholesterol, visit [www.mercksource.com](http://www.mercksource.com).

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