

Healthy Hearts

Specialized heart care is here.

Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute is your partner in the journey to a heart healthy life.



Carolinan HealthCare System

27.1 MILLION

That's the number of Americans currently living with heart disease.

600,000

That's the number of lives heart disease claims each year – making it the single deadliest disease in this country. It's also a leading cause of disability.

Heart disease is an umbrella term for a number of conditions that affect this vital organ. You may have heard of heart failure or arrhythmias or coronary artery disease. While not entirely preventable, such cases of heart disease, in many instances, are avoidable. Rising obesity rates, smoking, unhealthy diets and a lack of physical activity are just some of the modifiable factors that have contributed to the epidemic. People who have coronary artery disease face increased risks of heart attacks, stroke, heart failure and a number of other serious and life-threatening ailments.

The good news is that you can take matters into your own hands. Learning about the different types of heart disease (what does heart failure mean, exactly?); what the signs and symptoms are (is that shortness of breath you've been experiencing something minor or the sign of a heart that's lost pumping power?); what risk factors you may have and how can they be modified; and what you can do about them are good steps toward curbing your chances of heart disease before it's too late.

It's also good to know that, should you or someone you love need it, there's a resource for renowned cardiac care right in your neighborhood. Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute offers the latest technologies and treatments and for a wide range of heart conditions. With 25 locations in the Carolinas and more than 50 years of expert care, you can count on Sanger's services and skilled physicians. You can find more information about us on the back cover of this booklet.

So, are you ready for a healthy heart? Let's get started!

What is heart disease?

Heart disease is a term used to describe any number of conditions that affect your heart. Many develop later in life, while others may be present from birth (congenital heart defects). Some, such as coronary artery disease, can trigger others – for example, heart failure or arrhythmias.

Here are some of the most common forms of heart disease:

Coronary Artery Disease

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most prevalent type of heart disease, affecting more than 16 million Americans by some estimates. Of the approximately 600,000 Americans heart disease kills each year, CAD claims the lives of more than 385,000 of them, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The disease occurs when fatty deposits made out of cholesterol – also called plaque – begin to accumulate on the walls of arteries that lead to the heart. This buildup hardens or narrows the arteries (a process known as atherosclerosis), making it more difficult for blood to get through and adequately supply the heart. This can lead to chest pain (angina), irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia), heart failure and heart attacks. Plaque buildup can occur in other areas of the body as well. Peripheral artery disease refers to a plaque buildup in the arteries that supply blood to the arms and legs, while carotid artery disease means there's a buildup in the arteries that supply blood to the brain – a common cause of stroke.

Heart Failure

Despite what its name may suggest, heart failure does not mean the heart has stopped working altogether. Rather, it signals that the heart has stopped working the way it should and can no longer pump blood efficiently. This is usually a result of conditions that injure the heart, such as CAD, high blood pressure and diabetes. Complications from heart failure include kidney, liver and heart valve damage, as well as heart attack and stroke. It can also eventually lead to the need for a heart transplant or use of an artificial heart device.

Arrhythmia

Your heart works as a pump in a complex system that brings blood to all areas of your body. To help maintain this function, your heart has an electrical system that tells it when to contract. But sometimes disturbances occur in this system, which can lead to an arrhythmia. When you have an arrhythmia, your heart either beats too fast (tachycardia), too slow (bradycardia) or irregularly. Potassium imbalances, heart attacks or heart muscle damage from previous heart attacks, congenital heart disease, heart failure or enlarged heart, problems with the thyroid gland, certain medications, alcohol and caffeine, drugs and cigarette smoking can all trigger arrhythmias. Some arrhythmias aren't considered serious and won't need treatment, while others may be life threatening and require surgery or a device, such as a pacemaker or implantable defibrillator, to maintain a safe rhythm.

Heart Valve Disease

Your heart has four valves – each with a flap – that keep blood flowing in the correct direction through its four chambers. When these valves malfunction (defects present at birth, age and infections can all cause valve problems), they may allow blood to flow backward or they may not open enough to allow blood to flow freely. These issues can all affect how your heart pumps and increase your risk for heart failure, stroke, blood clots and sudden cardiac arrest.

Cardiomyopathy

Cardiomyopathy is a disease that weakens and enlarges (or thickens) the heart, making it more difficult for it to pump blood effectively. In most cases, the cause is unknown. However, conditions including chronic high blood pressure, diabetes, damage from previous heart attacks and heart valve issues may contribute. Complications from cardiomyopathy include heart failure, blood clots, cardiac arrest and sudden death.

Know your heart risk factors and warning signs.

The problem with heart disease is that not everyone has symptoms, so you may not suspect anything is wrong until you have a major event, such as a heart attack or stroke. Your best defense is to know your risk factors, as well as what symptoms to watch for.

Are you at risk?

Some risk factors for heart disease are out of your control, such as advancing age (for men, the risk of artery narrowing or hardening increases after age 45; for women, after age 55) and a family history of heart disease. Still, there are other risk factors you can do something about. These include:

- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol/high triglyceride levels
- Diabetes and pre-diabetes
- Smoking
- Overweight or obesity
- Physical inactivity
- An unhealthy diet (consuming foods high in saturated and trans fats, sodium, sugar or alcohol)
- Metabolic syndrome (a grouping of risk factors, such as a large waistline, high triglyceride levels, low HDL cholesterol levels, high blood pressure and high fasting blood sugar)
- The use of birth control pills
- Stress or depression
- Sleep apnea

Having just one risk factor doubles your chances of developing heart disease, so it's important to talk with your healthcare provider about what you can do about reducing your risk. Your provider may recommend lifestyle changes, such as a diet overhaul or a regular exercise routine and cutting out bad habits, like smoking. In other cases, you may need to take medication or require certain treatments, such as special breathing devices if you have sleep apnea.

Symptom Checker

Again, not everyone receives a warning sign that heart disease is in the works. Those symptoms that might occur also depend on what type of heart disease you have. They include:

- Angina, or chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Pain or discomfort in your extremities
- A racing or slow heartbeat, or the feeling that your heart is fluttering
- Dizziness
- Pale skin
- Fatigue
- Swelling, particularly in the extremities or in the abdomen
- Syncope (temporary loss of consciousness due to a drop in blood pressure)

If you have any of these symptoms, make an appointment to get them checked out. Some of these symptoms can also be signs of other, less serious illnesses. But you won't know until you see your provider.

Living the heart-healthy life.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost half of Americans have one of the three major risk factors for heart disease – uncontrolled high LDL (bad) cholesterol, uncontrolled high blood pressure and smoking.

But no matter what risk factors you have, developing heart disease isn't written in stone. Take charge of your health now to prevent problems down the road:

Get Moving

You don't have to run a marathon or spend countless hours at the gym to reap the rewards of regular exercise. Instead, as little as 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day, such as a brisk walk broken up into 10-minute segments, can have a positive impact on your circulation, weight, cholesterol and blood pressure (in fact, regular exercise can reduce blood pressure as well as some medications). Regular exercise has also been shown to manage stress and help with quit-smoking efforts.

What activity you choose to help you stay active is up to you, but try to find one that interests you to help you stick with it.

Keep The Scale From Tipping

More than one-third of American adults are obese and another third are overweight, meaning their body mass index (BMI) is 25 or higher. BMI takes into account height and weight, so it can be misleading for someone who is muscular and thus may weigh more but is still healthy – or for someone who has a normal BMI but is otherwise unhealthy due to more weight in their midsection. That's why experts, like those at Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute, also like to look at waist measurements. For men, a waist circumference of more than 40 inches is considered overweight, while women who measure 35 inches in the waist are overweight.

Lifestyle changes such as revamping your diet and exercising more frequently can help keep weight in check. Losing just 10 percent of your weight – or 20 pounds off a 200-pound frame – can do wonders for blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes risk.

Know Your Numbers

Do you know what your blood pressure normally is? How about your cholesterol levels? A simple blood pressure reading and a blood test to screen your total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL (good) cholesterol and triglycerides (another type of blood fat) can help provide insight into how your heart is faring. You should be aiming for:

- Total cholesterol of less than 200 mg/dL
- LDL cholesterol of 129 mg/dL or less for near-optimal or optimal levels
- HDL of 60 mg/dL or higher
- Triglycerides of 150 mg/dL or less for normal or optimal levels

Quit Smoking

Lighting up, or even just being around someone who is smoking tobacco, puts your heart at risk for damage.

Chemicals in cigarettes can trigger the narrowing of arteries, which, in turn, makes your heart work harder and raises blood pressure and heart rate. If you're a female smoker over the age of 35 and you take birth control pills, the risk of smoking leading to a heart attack or stroke is greatly increased.

However, the good news is that your heart begins to recover soon after quitting; within one year of stopping, your heart disease risk is reduced significantly. There are many quit-smoking aids out there, from inhalers and oral medications to nicotine patches and behavioral therapy. Ask your provider about which may work best for your individual needs.

Eat Right

To do right by your heart, think less fat, cholesterol and sodium and more fruits and vegetables (anywhere from five to 10 servings a day is ideal) when it comes to what you eat. Drink alcohol only in moderation (two drinks a day for men, one for women) and look for foods that contain omega-3 fatty acids, which can be found in salmon and mackerel, as well as certain types of oil, such as canola.

Your heart-healthy diet.

Think of your diet like oil for your car. Put in the good stuff and you'll keep your engine humming along for many miles. But fill it with the wrong type of oil and you'll be doing harm to your system.

Coupled with an overall healthier lifestyle, eating right can help reduce your risk for heart disease and lower the chances of suffering a heart attack or stroke by lowering cholesterol, keeping blood pressure in check and helping maintain a healthy weight, according to experts at Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute. It can also help prevent the development of Type 2 diabetes.

Plate pleasers

Heart-healthy eating plans focus on keeping certain elements of the diet in a healthy range. That means no more than 7 percent of your daily calories coming from saturated fat, no more than 25 percent to 35 percent of your daily calories coming from fat, less than 200 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol a day, no more than 2,300 mg of sodium daily (less if you are over age 50 or have certain health conditions, such as high blood pressure) and just enough calories to maintain a healthy weight.

The recipe for a healthy heart is simple and should include the following ingredients:

- Fruits and vegetables are key. The Harvard-based Nurses' Health Study and Health Professionals Follow-up Study found that of 110,000 men and women, those who ate eight or more servings of fruits and vegetables such as spinach, Swiss chard, broccoli and citrus fruits daily were 30 percent less likely to have a heart attack or stroke than those who ate less than 1.5 servings a day. Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute recommends getting at least five servings daily.
- Whole grains (for example: whole wheat, whole oats, oatmeal, whole-grain corn, brown rice, wild rice, whole rye, whole-grain barley, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, quinoa and sorghum) can substantially lower total cholesterol, LDL (bad) cholesterol, triglycerides and insulin levels.
- Low-fat or nonfat dairy, such as milk (skim or 1 percent), cheese and yogurt, should also be a part of your heart-healthy diet. In one study, consuming low-fat dairy was associated with a lower stroke risk in men and women.
- Healthy proteins are recommended, but watch portion sizes. Two- to 3-ounce servings of protein are ideal. Think skinless poultry, lean meats (for beef, think round, chuck, sirloin and tenderloin; for pork, try tenderloin, loin chops or leg), fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts.
- Good fats, also known as polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, which are found in fish, nuts and vegetable oils (olive, corn, canola, sunflower, etc.), can help lower your cholesterol levels. Eat them in place of foods containing saturated or trans fats, which raise your cholesterol.

What's off-limits?

What you don't eat is just as important as what you decide to put on your plate. Consuming foods that are high in certain fats and cholesterol can help lead to the buildup of plaque in the arteries. Over time, this buildup can narrow those vital pathways leading to and from your heart and brain, triggering a heart attack or stroke. To help keep your arteries clear, try minimizing or eliminating:

- Saturated fats (for example, full-fat dairy; baked goods such as cakes, cookies and doughnuts; fatty meats such as prime rib and sausage; and coconut and palm oil)
- Trans fats (which are typically found in processed foods such as cakes, cookies and pies; stick or hard margarine; and potato chips – the words “partially hydrogenated” on food labels means a product contains trans fats)
- Cholesterol (found in foods like organ meats, sausage and full-fat dairy products)

To help curb high blood pressure and the development of diabetes, also cut back on:

- Sodium
- Added sugars (these include corn syrup, fructose, glucose, sucrose, dextrose, honey and raw sugar), which can lead to overweight – thus increasing your diabetes risk

Cooking methods make a difference.

Of course, just about any healthy food can turn bad if it's not properly prepared. To keep fat, cholesterol and calories to a minimum – and your dish heart healthy – try baking, steaming, poaching, roasting, grilling, sautéing or stir-frying your meals, instead of frying.

Heart care at Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute

At Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute, we always have your best interests at heart. And we know time is of the essence when it comes to treating heart disease and limiting the risk of damage to this vital organ. That's why we target a wide array of heart conditions and offer highly individualized care aimed at getting you an accurate diagnosis and rapid treatment to ensure the most beneficial outcome possible.

With more than 90 physicians and 25 locations to conveniently serve you, Sanger offers a team of heart experts from a variety of subspecialties, all working together to form the basis for a comprehensive program that ensures the highest level of patient care. To that end, we offer extensive services from cardiac catheterization and cardiac device implantation to treatments for heart failure and congenital heart disease. Our cardiothoracic surgery program was also honored by the Society of Thoracic Surgeons and is considered one of the best in the nation.

Questions?

For more information about Sanger Heart & Vascular Institute,
or to find a location near you, call 877-999-7484 or visit
CarolinasHealthCare.org/heart-care



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