



Cardiovascular Disease: what is it?

Information to improve your health from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

Cardiovascular Disease, also known as heart disease, can refer to any number of diseases and conditions that affect your heart and circulatory system. Many of these conditions lead to a narrowing of the blood vessels or blockages in your arteries that can lead to heart attacks, angina (chest pain) or strokes. Cardiovascular disease may also involve arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat), cardiac infections and structural defects of the heart.

Cardiovascular Disease and You

To help control your cardiovascular symptoms, it's important to stay educated and take proactive steps.

Understand what your blood test result numbers mean, learn about sleep apnea, and find ways to reduce saturated fats and added sugars when you cook.

The purpose of this newsletter is to help you better understand heart diseases.

We hope you find this information useful.

Taking steps toward a healthier life can make a huge difference.



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What you need to know about

Sleep Apnea

One in five people have some form of sleep apnea, and about 5% of the population has apnea severe enough to cause problems.

Sleep apnea can cause serious problems including increased fatigue and stress, which can lead to high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms and even strokes.



Sleep apnea occurs when your airways become obstructed or some other cause creates a pause in your breathing during your sleep. This may or may not wake you, but it always affects sleep patterns and how your body rests.

If you have sleep apnea, make an appointment with your doctor. You may need additional tests, such as a sleep study, to fully diagnose your problem and determine the best treatment.

In the meantime, if you're struggling for a good night's rest, here are a few general tips to help:

- **Avoid caffeine.** If you must have a morning cup of joe, that's fine, but try not to drink any caffeine in the afternoon or evening.
- **Limit alcohol.** Alcohol is notorious for disrupting sleep patterns. Even one drink can have a noticeable effect on your sleep.
- **Exercise.** Getting regular daily exercise can help you feel ready to rest when you hit the bed. Just don't do it too late in the day. Your body may require a few hours of rest after strenuous exercise to wind down.
- **Make a routine.** Develop a bedtime ritual to help you ease off to sleep. Consider warm baths, dimming the lights, drinking warm herbal (caffeine-free) tea or reading a book.




YOUR HEALTH by the NUMBERS

Have you ever had a visit with your doctor only to be confused by the numbers you received after having lab work or a screening? This is what some of those numbers are and what they mean.

TEST	RECOMMENDED RANGE	DESCRIPTION
Blood Sugar	70 – 99 mg/dl (Fasting) Less than 140 (Non-Fasting)	<i>Test can be done fasting or non-fasting (with or without an empty stomach). High blood sugar levels can indicate pre-diabetes or diabetes.</i>
Blood Pressure	Systolic <120 (Top Number) Diastolic <80 (Bottom Number)	<i>This is a measure of the force of the blood in your bloodstream. High blood pressure increases your risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, kidney disease, stroke, vision loss and hardening of arteries.</i>
Blood Cholesterol	Total Cholesterol (mg/dl): <200 HDL-Cholesterol (mg/dl): 60+ LDL-Cholesterol (mg/dl): <130 TC/HDL Ratio: <3.5 Triglycerides: <150	<i>Cholesterol is found in the bloodstream and cells. It is used to form cell membranes, hormones and vitamin D. Too much Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL) can increase your risk for heart attack or stroke. High Density Lipoprotein (HDL) is known as "good cholesterol" because it beneficially carries cholesterol back to the liver for reusing or excretion.</i>
Body Composition	Body Mass Index (BMI) 18.5 – 24.9	<i>Being overweight or obese is a primary risk factor for a multitude of diseases including heart disease, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea and even certain types of cancer. Your BMI is determined by a ratio of height to weight.</i>

Reduce Saturated Fats with Simple Substitutions

The holidays will be here soon. For many, this means baking sweet treats for the family. But just because you've cranked up the oven doesn't mean you need to crank up the excess saturated fat and sugar in your diet.

INSTEAD OF...	SUBSTITUTE THIS...	WORKS BEST WITH...
1 cup butter 	½ Cup Applesauce OR 1 Cup Avocado OR 1 Cup Banana	<i>Sweet breads or muffins. Adds healthy fiber and vitamins.</i> <i>Brownies and cookies. As an added bonus, avocado can replace mayonnaise in many savory dishes.</i> <i>Brownies and cookies. Not only do bananas taste good in place of butter, they add additional fiber, vitamins and potassium to your diet.</i>
1 cup sugar 	½ tsp. Vanilla Extract OR 1 tsp. Liquid Stevia or 2 Tbsp. Stevia Powder OR 1 Cup Applesauce	<i>Brownies, cookies, sweet breads and cakes. This simple substitution reduces almost 400 calories!</i> <i>Cakes, sweet breads and cookies. This product is an all-natural sugar substitute that is actually up to 300 times sweeter than sugar without the added calories.</i> <i>Cookies, brownies, cakes, and pretty much anything you can think of. Adds healthy fiber and nutrients while reducing the calorie count.</i>
1 cup flour 	1 Cup Nut Flour PLUS ½ tsp. Rising Agent OR 1 Cup Whole Wheat Flour OR 1 Cup Black Beans	<i>Cakes, sweet breads, cookies. Because nut flours are not as light as other flours, a rising agent needs to be added such as baking powder, baking soda or yeast for your goods to rise in the oven.</i> <i>Basically, this works in anything. With whole wheat you get extra fiber which can help you better digest food.</i> <i>Brownies, chocolate cake. Adds healthy fiber, protein and nutrients while cutting down on the starch and empty calories.</i>

6 SIGNS of a Heart Attack

Knowing the warning signs of a heart attack can be the difference between life and death. Never hesitate to contact your healthcare provider if you experience any of these troubling symptoms:

- 1. Unusual or severe chest pains**
- 2. Unusual upper body pain** (especially pain that radiates along your neck and arms)
- 3. Excessive sweating** without cause
- 4. Extreme fatigue** for no reason
- 5. Lightheadedness or dizziness**
- 6. Difficult breathing** (sometimes described as "breathing with an elephant on your chest")

Also note that not everyone having a heart attack will experience symptoms. The best way to take care of your heart is to live a healthy lifestyle by exercising regularly and eating a diet low in saturated fats.



TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

It's important to be prepared for every doctor's visit. If you've been diagnosed with a cardiac disease, be sure to ask about:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol
- Body weight/body mass index (BMI)
- Blood glucose
- Lifestyle issues such as smoking, diet and exercise



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