



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

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

To help control your cardiovascular symptoms, it's important to stay educated about your condition and take proactive steps to stay healthy. Understand different reasons for chest pains. Learn more about how to improve your heart rate, and look for ways to improve your blood flow.

The purpose of this newsletter is to help you better understand heart diseases. We hope you find this information useful.

Thank you for reading!



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Improve Your Flow

Life-giving oxygen and other nutrients are delivered to every single vital organ through your blood flow. Improving blood flow keeps your entire body healthy.

How to improve blood flow:

- Quit using tobacco.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Enjoy light to moderate aerobic exercise at least five times a week for 30 minutes or more at a time.
- Eat more healthy fats, such as the fats in oily fish like salmon or sardines.
- Avoid unhealthy saturated fats in your diet.
- Drink unsweetened tea, specifically green tea, for antioxidants.
- Keep your blood pressure under control.
- Move more; sitting too long reduces blood flow.



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 the following:

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



Why do I have chest pain?

Chest pain can be scary. If you have been diagnosed with a heart disease, it's not something to take lightly. Here are some possible reasons for chest pain.

Heart Attack

A heart attack happens when part of the heart loses blood supply. This can be caused by blocked arteries, swelling in different heart muscles, an abnormal heart contraction or other related conditions. Other medical terms for heart attacks and related conditions are “myocardial infarction” or “acute coronary syndrome.”

CLASSIC SYMPTOMS

- Severe to moderate chest pain
- Pressure in the chest making it hard to breathe
- A heavy feeling like something is sitting on your chest
- Pain that comes and goes but lasts longer than a few minutes at a time

OTHER POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS

- Shortness of breath
- Extreme tiredness
- Lightheadedness
- Nausea
- Cold sweats

It's important to note that not all heart attacks have the same symptoms. Some of the symptoms above may be present while others may not occur. The symptoms might not even feel related to the heart at all. Often, heart attack pain is felt in the arms, along the neck, jawline, or even in the upper back. Sometimes, especially with people with diabetes, heart attacks happen with symptoms similar to indigestion.

Angina

Angina is the medical term for a condition which causes chronic heart pain. It is typically caused by a slow or reduced flow of blood to the heart from a blockage in arteries or narrow blood vessels.

There are two types of angina: stable and unstable. People with stable angina tend to be able to control their temporary heart pain with medication or rest. Unstable angina which cannot be controlled leads to increased risk of heart attack. Anyone currently being treated for angina is at greater risk of experiencing a heart attack and should monitor their symptoms closely.



YOUR Heart Rate

Heart rate is a vital sign often used to measure heart health. It is the measure of how many times your heart beats per minute (BPM). Your heart rate changes depending on what is going on around you. If you're exercising, being more active than normal, or in a heightened emotional state, your heart rate typically rises. If you're relaxed and sitting around, you can measure what is called your "resting heart rate."

A healthy adult should have a resting heart rate between 60 and 100. Some athletes or those who get regular exercise may have a resting heart rate as low as 40.

Exercise is one of the very best ways to keep your heart in shape, and cardiovascular training is a form of exercise designed to lower your resting heart rate to increase overall heart health. Cardiovascular training is done by measuring your heart rate during exercise. There are many commercial heart rate monitors available for performing this kind of training.

The table below shows what your target heart rate and maximum heart rate should be during your exercise sessions for cardiovascular training.

Heartburn

Heartburn can be related to a number of medical conditions such as acid reflux, indigestion or hernias around the stomach, among other digestive issues. The good news about heartburn is it is not related to the heart in any way, and it is not a life-threatening condition. It's caused by irritation along the upper portions of the digestive system, typically from stomach acids.

SYMPTOMS

- Burning sensation in gut or food pipe
- Burping
- Nausea
- Bloating
- Sharp chest pain

Since this pain is often felt near the heart, the symptoms are sometimes mistaken as a heart attack. In fact, doctors may have a hard time distinguishing between heartburn and heart attacks without performing additional tests.

Heartburn typically...

- Worsens if you lay down.
- Presents itself after eating or after drinking acidic beverages.
- Does not cause breathlessness or heaviness in the chest.
- Appears along with increased belching or a bloated feeling.
- Will typically go away after being treated with over-the-counter or prescription medicines designed to treat heartburn.

If you suspect a heart attack, or if your chest pain symptoms don't improve, never hesitate to contact your doctor or call 911. **If you're having a heart attack, prompt medical attention can be a matter of life or death.**

AGE	TARGET HEART RATE 50-80% Exertion (BPM)	AVG. MAX. HEART RATE 100% Exertion (BPM)
30	95-162	190
35	93-157	185
40	90-153	180
45	88-149	175
50	85-145	170
55	83-140	165
60	80-136	160
65	78-132	155
70+	75-128	150

Always remember to talk with your doctor before starting any new exercise program.

Consider us your support system.

We're here to help you manage your chronic condition. And we can suggest preventive measures that will help you take better care of yourself.

Connect with your Care Coordinator today.

Call **1-888-841-5741** for more information.

