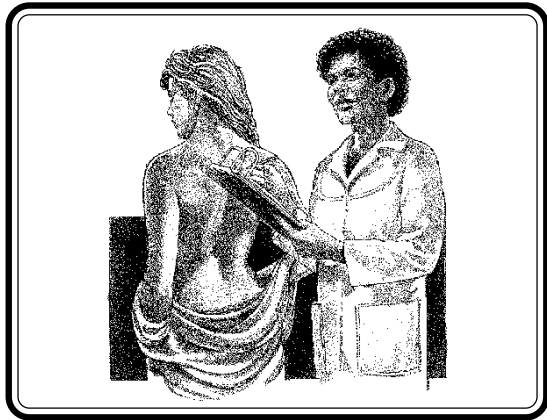


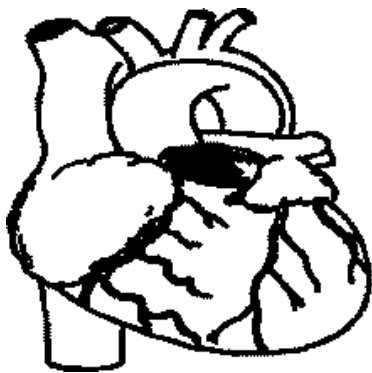
# Your Health: Taking Control

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service • Oklahoma State University



## WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

Heart disease is the number one killer in the United States. In this country alone, heart and blood vessel disease claim a life every 32 seconds. That translates to nearly a million Americans every year. One American in four currently suffers from some type of heart or blood vessel disease. However, there is good news about heart disease. Deaths due to heart disease are declining in this country. Improvements in medicine and changes in life-style habits account for much of this decline. It may only take a few simple changes to reduce your risk of heart disease.



## What is Atherosclerosis?

Heart disease is a silent process that is usually the result of **atherosclerosis**. Atherosclerosis is a process in which substances such as fat and cholesterol slowly build up in the lining of the arteries. These deposits narrow the blood vessels. Eventually a blood vessel may be completely closed off, either because the deposits block the vessel, or because a blood clot plugs the narrowed passage. When a blood vessel is blocked, blood and oxygen are not supplied to the cells nearby tissue; this results in damage to that part of the body. If the blockage occurs in an artery serving the heart muscle, a heart attack results. If it occurs in an artery serving the brain, a stroke results.

There are many factors which increase one's risk of heart disease. The three most important are high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, and cigarette smoking. Other important risk factors are diabetes, overweight, lack of exercise, and a family history of heart disease. Most people, including those who have a family history of heart disease, can reduce their risk of having a heart attack. A few simple measures can increase your chances of a longer and healthier life. Learning to control your risk factors now may prevent you from having a heart attack in the future.

**Suggested Readings:**

Oklahoma State University Extension Fact Sheets:

- T-3160, *Diet and Heart Disease*
- T-3159, *Diet and Hypertension*
- T-3138, *Dietary Fiber*
- T-3142, *Dietary Salt*
- T-3153, *Facts About Fat*
- T-3154, *Facts About Cholesterol*
- T-3165, *Food Guide Pyramid: Guide to Daily Food Choices*

**Reference List:**

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*National Cholesterol Education Program* United States Department of Agriculture. Beltsville, MD., 1991.

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McLanahan, S.M., Kirkeeide, R.L., Brand, R.J. and K.L. Gould. "Can lifestyle changes reverse coronary heart disease." *Lancet.* 336:129,1990.



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***For more information, contact your OSU  
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