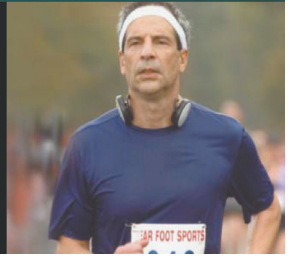
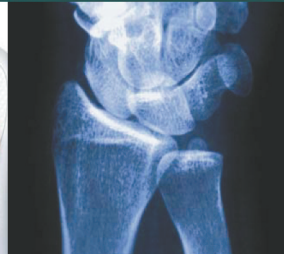
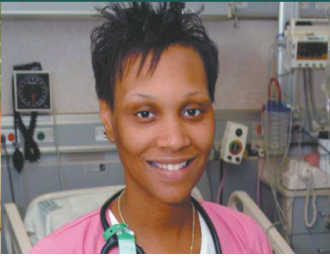


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Risk Factors of Heart Disease

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Heart disease is the leading cause of death among men 45 years of age and older and among women 55 years of age and older.

The biggest factors that contribute to heart disease are:

- One or more “first degree” relatives had heart disease at an early age. For example, a father or brother with heart disease before age 55, or a mother or sister with heart disease before age 65.
- Cigarette smoking
- Diabetes
- Begin overweight, especially if your waist measurement is more than 35 inches
- Physical inactivity
- High blood pressure (above 140/90)
- High LDL cholesterol level. LDL stands for low-density lipoprotein. It is often called the “bad” cholesterol.
- Low HDL cholesterol level. HDL stands for high-density lipoprotein. It is often called the “good” cholesterol.



PRAKASH S. BEERAKA, M.D.

Although nothing can be done about one’s family history or age, changes can be made to the other risk factors:

1) Quit smoking. Smoking more than doubles the risk of a heart attack for both men and women. Smokers have a higher risk of developing many chronic disorders (long lasting conditions), including atherosclerosis - the buildup of fatty substances in the arteries which can lead to coronary heart disease, heart attack (myocardial infarction) and stroke. Smoking decreases your ability to perform physical activity and increases the tendency for blood to clot. It also decreases your HDL (good) cholesterol. Smoking puts you at risk for developing poor circulation to your legs (peripheral artery disease) and aortic aneurysm (bulging /dilatation of aorta - major blood vessel in the abdomen, which can leak or rupture). It is very important to help yourself by trying to quit smoking. It is difficult, but give yourself a chance. If you need more support, talk to your doctor and also look for quit-smoking programs.

One year after quitting smoking, the excess risk of heart disease is half that of a smoker’s.

2) Keep blood pressure under control. High blood pressure can lead to stroke, heart attack, kidney failure, and even heart failure. Uncontrolled high blood pressure can injure or kill you. It is sometimes called “the silent killer” because it has no symptoms. It is very important that if you have Hypertension, to see your doctor regularly and keep it under control. Again, you may not have any complaints from high blood pressure, but that does not mean that you are okay. It is a silent killer, and very important that you take appropriate medications and lose weight, exercise, quit smoking and reduce salt intake to help modify blood pressure.

3) Control cholesterol levels. It is normal to have cholesterol, but too much cholesterol in the blood is a major risk for heart attack and for stroke. LDL cholesterol is the “bad” cholesterol. When too much of it circulates in the blood, it can clog arteries, increasing your risk of heart attack and stroke. LDL cholesterol is produced naturally by the body, but many people inherit genes that cause them to make too much. Eating saturated fat, trans fats and dietary cholesterol also increases how much you have. It is important for you to know your cholesterol level. If it is high, you can lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. Again, you may not have any symptoms from elevated cholesterol, but it is a risk for developing problems. Whether you have been prescribed medication or advised to make diet and lifestyle changes to help manage your cholesterol, carefully follow your doctor’s recommendations. Diet and exercise are key to lowering cholesterol levels. Limit cholesterol and fat intake.

4) Exercise. The heart is a muscle and needs regular exercise to stay healthy. Aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, jogging or biking, gives the heart the best workout. Exercise can prevent heart disease and many other health problems. Exercise can also lower blood pressure, increase HDL “good” cholesterol in your blood, control blood sugar by improving how your body uses insulin, reduce feelings of stress, control body weight and make you feel good about yourself. By exercising for as little as 30 minutes each day you can reduce your risk of heart disease.

5) Maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight puts extra strain on the heart and blood vessels. If you have too much fat, especially if a lot of it is at your waist, you are at higher risk for such health problems as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes. If you are overweight or obese, you can reduce your risk for heart disease by successfully losing weight and keeping it off. It is crucial to understand your recommended calorie intake, which is the amount of food calories you are consuming compared to the energy calories you are burning off with different levels of physical activity. In addition to talking to your doctor, it is also a good idea to see a nutritionist to help you look into your eating habits.

6) Maintain a healthy diet. A healthy diet is high in fiber and low in fat. You may be eating plenty of food, but your body may not be getting the nutrients it needs to be healthy. Nutrient-rich foods have vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients, but are lower in calories. To get the nutrients you need, choose foods like vegetables, fruits, whole-grain products and fat-free or low-fat dairy products most often. Vegetables and fruits are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber - and they are low in calories. Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables may help you control your weight and your blood pressure.

7) Control your blood sugar/ or diabetes. Diabetes is treatable in that controlling glucose can slow the progression of long-term complications. Try to prevent diabetes by maintaining your ideal weight, eating healthfully and regular exercise. When diabetes is detected, your doctor may prescribe changes in eating habits, weight control, exercise programs and medication to keep it in check. It is critical for people with diabetes to have regular check-ups and to know that they are two to four times more likely to have heart disease or a stroke than adults without diabetes.

Talk to your doctor about planning a healthy diet. If exercise and diet do not help enough, you might need to take medicines. Most important is taking your medications regularly if your doctor advises you.

Dr. Prakash Beeraka is a Board Certified Physician at Jeter-Skinner Family Practice, and is currently accepting new patients. To make an appointment, please call (843) 662 - 1533. Jeter-Skinner Family Practice is located in McLeod Medical Park West Suite 160, at 305 East Cheves Street, Florence, SC, on the McLeod Regional Medical Center campus.