

Cardiovascular Disease

What is cardiovascular disease?

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a general term used to describe disorders that can affect your heart (cardio) and/or your body's system of blood vessels (vascular).

Most cardiovascular diseases reflect **chronic** conditions – conditions that develop or persist over a long period of time. However, some of the outcomes of cardiovascular disease may be **acute** events such as heart attacks and strokes that occur suddenly when a vessel supplying blood to the heart or brain becomes blocked.

The most popular usage of the term CVD is in reference to diseases that are associated with **atherosclerosis**. These diseases occur more frequently in people who smoke, who have **high blood pressure**, who have high **blood cholesterol** (especially high **LDL**), who are overweight, who do not exercise, and/or who have **diabetes**.

Public health initiatives focus on decreasing CVD by encouraging people to:

- Follow a healthy diet
- Avoid smoking
- Exercise regularly
- If diabetic, maintain good control of **blood glucose**

Some of the classifications of CVD include:

- **Coronary heart disease (CHD)** and **coronary artery disease (CAD)** – disease of the blood vessels supplying the heart that may lead to:
 - **Angina**
 - **Heart attack**
 - **Congestive heart failure**
- Cerebrovascular disease – disease of the blood vessels supplying the brain that may lead to:
 - Transient ischaemic attacks (TIA) or "mini strokes"
 - **Strokes**
- Peripheral vascular disease – disease of blood vessels supplying the arms and legs that can lead to:
 - Claudication – obstructed blood flow in arteries, causing pain

- Gangrene – death of tissues in legs due to poor circulation
- **Aneurysms**

Other types of disease can also affect the heart and/or blood vessels. These are described in more detail in the **Heart Disease** and **Vasculitis** articles and include:

- Congenital heart disease – resulting from malformation of the heart structure during development (includes some valvular diseases)
- Valvular disease – defects in the structure or function of a heart valve; may be either **congenital** or acquired
- Cardiomyopathy – weakening of the heart muscle
- Myocarditis – inflammation or infection of the heart muscle
- Vasculitis – inflammation of blood vessels
- Blood clots that develop in the veins (thrombosis) and that detach and go to other organs (embolism)

The World Health Organization estimates that 17.1 million people die each year from cardiovascular diseases, representing almost 30% of all global deaths. Over 80% of deaths from CVD occur in low- and middle-income countries, where there is increased exposure to risk factors and less access to preventive measures and adequate health care. As the leading cause of death worldwide, cardiovascular disease is a focus of international interest.