



Fact sheet

What is cardiovascular disease?

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, cardiovascular disease (also known as heart disease) covers all diseases and conditions of the heart and blood vessels. These include coronary heart disease, stroke, and heart failure¹.

What is coronary heart disease?

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, coronary heart disease (also known as ischemic heart disease and coronary artery disease) is the most common form of cardiovascular disease. It is a condition in which the heart's arteries (blood vessels) become narrower. There are two major forms – heart attack and angina².

What are the risk factors?

- Diabetes
- Smoking
- High cholesterol
- Physical inactivity
- Being overweight or obese
- Age (the risk increases with age)
- Family history
- High blood pressure
- Stress

Dietary risk factors for cardiovascular disease include:

- High intake of fat, dietary cholesterol sodium
- Low intake of fruit and vegetables

Heart health

- Despite improvement in survival rates, cardiovascular disease is still the world's leading cause of death – it claims over 17 million lives a year.³
- Thanks to the advances in treatment of heart disease, the death rate from cardiovascular disease has fallen by 75%⁴ since a peak in the late 1960s, a feat our researchers have contributed to. (Back then heart disease was responsible for around 60,000 lives a year, roughly 55%



deaths a year).

- In Australia, cardiovascular disease accounts for 33% of deaths (46,106 in 2009), of which 52% are women.⁵
- 125 people die a day from heart disease⁶.
- Cardiovascular disease affects more than 3.7 million Australians⁷ – that is, one in five people and two out of three families⁸.
- Cardiovascular disease is also a leading cause of disability. About 1.4 million Australians have a disability associated with cardiovascular conditions⁹.
- The number of people hospitalised with a heart attack or chest pain is likely to double by 2030, and reach almost 250,000 by 2050. This is because of the ageing population, and the rise in obesity and diabetes¹⁰.
- Coronary heart disease (which includes heart attack, angina and blocked arteries) remains the specific leading cause of death of Australians at 16%. Stroke is the second biggest killer, followed by dementia and Alzheimer's disease, and in fourth place is trachea and lung cancers¹¹.
- For working people who suffer acute coronary syndrome (heart attack and chest pain), the average time before returning to work is three months – and one in five will remain off work¹².
- Four times more men die from coronary heart disease than from prostate cancer, and four times more women die from coronary heart disease than breast cancer.¹³

Women and heart disease

- Cardiovascular disease is the largest single cause of death among women, accounting for a third of all women's deaths worldwide¹⁴.
- Over 24,000 Australian women each year die of cardiovascular disease – accounting for 52% of deaths from cardiovascular disease.¹⁵
- Women make up more than two-thirds of Australians with heart failure¹⁶.



- 78% of women in Australia are unaware that heart disease is their number one killer¹⁷.
- Women's risk of heart disease increases about 10 years later than for men¹⁸.
- Women wait longer than men to go to hospital when having a heart attack. Physicians are slower to recognise the symptoms because chest pain and EKG changes are less common than in men.
- Nearly two-thirds of the deaths from heart attacks in women occur among those who have no history of chest pain¹⁹.
- About two million Australian women (one in five) have some form of cardiovascular disease (226,000 have coronary heart disease and 176,000 heart failure)²⁰.
- Eight out of ten women do know that heart disease is their biggest killer²¹.

Risk factors

- Worldwide obesity has more than doubled since 1980²² and the rate continues to climb at an alarming rate, also in Australia.
- "The prevalence of obesity has risen so dramatically worldwide that the World Health Organisation has called it a 'global epidemic'."²³
- Diabetes is about three times as common as it was 20 years ago. The growing prevalence is linked to low levels of exercise and rising levels of overweight and obesity²⁴. Over half those who have cardiovascular disease have diabetes²⁵, a real concern given the rising numbers of diabetes in Australia.
- According to the World Health Organisation, physical inactivity, smoking and an unhealthy diet are responsible for about 80% of cardiovascular disease. And, most deaths attributed to cardiovascular disease are preventable.
- 90% of Australians have at least one modifiable risk factor for heart disease, and 16% have four or more risk factors²⁶. The main risks are: being overweight, family history, age, hypertension, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol, and physical inactivity.



- Engaging in physical activity for at least 30 minutes every day of the week will help to prevent heart attacks and strokes.²⁷ In fact, physical inactivity increases the risk by 50%²⁸.
- 40% of Australians who die from smoking die from heart, stroke or blood vessel disease.²⁹
- 61% of Australians are overweight or obese and 63% do not meet the recommended amount of physical activity³⁰.
- 94% of Australians do not eat enough fruit and vegetables³¹. (Fewer than 1 in 10 usually consume the recommended number of serves of vegetables daily.³²)
- Those who live in rural and remote areas of Australia generally have poorer health than their major city counterparts, with higher levels of mortality, disease and health risk factors. Overall, coronary heart disease and other heart diseases are responsible for these higher death rates³³.
- Acute stress is increasingly linked to heart attack. It's estimated that external triggers – such as a sudden rise in stress or physical exertion – can be a factor in up to 40% of heart attacks³⁴.
- In winter, there is a 60% increase in risk of heart attack³⁵.
- According to the Government's 2009 National Preventative Health Strategy, 'A large part of the difference between advantaged and disadvantaged Australians, and between city dwellers and remote Australians, can be attributed to obesity, tobacco and alcohol.'

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). *Impact of falling cardiovascular disease death rates: deaths delayed and years of life extended*. Bulletin 70. April 2009.

² AIHW. *Impact of falling cardiovascular disease death rates: deaths delayed and years of life extended*. Bulletin 70. April 2009.

³ World Health Organisation http://www.who.int/topics/cardiovascular_diseases/en/

⁴ AIHW <http://www.aihw.gov.au/media-release-detail/?id=6442464883>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). *Causes of Death Australia, 2009*

⁶ ABS. *Cause of Death Australia, 2009*

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Impact of falling cardiovascular disease death rates: deaths delayed and years of life extended*. Bulletin 70. April 2009.

⁸ ABS. *National Health Survey 2007–2008*



[http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4364.0Main+Features12007-2008%20\(Reissue\)?OpenDocument](http://abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4364.0Main+Features12007-2008%20(Reissue)?OpenDocument)
and National Heart Foundation

http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/Heart_Information/Statistics/Pages/default.aspx

⁹ AIHW. *Impact of falling cardiovascular disease death rates: deaths delayed and years of life extended*. Bulletin 70. April 2009.

¹⁰ Access Economics. *The economic costs of a heart attack and chest pain (Acute Coronary Syndrome)*. June 2009.

<http://www.accesseconomics.com.au/publicationsreports/showreport.php?id=204>

¹¹ ABS. Cause of Death Australia, 2009

¹² National Preventative Health Strategy 2008.

¹³ ABS. Cause of Death Australia, 2009

¹⁴ World Health Organisation. *The World Health Report*, 2004.

¹⁵ ABS. Causes of Death, 2008.

¹⁶ AIHW statistics for 2006. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/cvd/index.cfm>

¹⁷ National Heart Foundation survey, 2009.

¹⁸ Stangle, V., Baumann, G., and Stangl, K. 'Coronary atherogenic risk factors in women.' *European Heart Journal* 23, no.22 (2002):1738–52.

¹⁹ World Heart Federation <http://www.world-heart-federation.org/cardiovascular-health/>

²⁰ AIHW. Women and heart disease: Cardiovascular profile of women in Australia. Cardiovascular disease series 34. June 2010.

²¹ National Heart Foundation 2010

http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/sites/GoRedforWomen/SiteCollectionDocuments/HFS0017_Viral%20V5_fin_al.pdf

²² World Health Organisation <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>

²³ AIHW. *A growing problem: Trends and patterns in overweight and obesity among adults in Australia, 1980 to 2001*

²⁴ AIHW. *Australia's Health 2010 - in Brief*

²⁵ ABS website 2011

²⁶ AIHW. *Living dangerously: Australians with multiple risk factors for cardiovascular disease*. Bulletin 24. February 2005.

²⁷ World Health Organisation http://www.who.int/topics/cardiovascular_diseases/en/

²⁸ World Heart Federation <http://www.worldheartfederation.org/cardiovascular-health>

²⁹ NSW Department of Health <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/topics/cardiovascular.html>

³⁰ AIHW. *Australia's Health 2010*. p482

³¹ ABS. National Health Survey 2007–2008.

³² AIHW. *Australia's Health 2010*. p482

³³ AIHW. *Australia's Health 2008*.

³⁴ Tofler, G.H., et al. 'Analysis of possible triggers of acute myocardial infarction.' *American Journal of Cardiology* 66 (1990): 22–27.

³⁵ Ornato, J.P., et al. 'Increased incidence of cardiac death attributed to acute myocardial infarction in the winter.' *Coronary Artery Disease* 1, No. 2 (Mar/Apr1990): 199–204.