



The Top Three Risk Factors for Heart Disease

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O'FALLON – Half of all Americans have at least one of the top three risk factors for heart disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The top three risk factors are: high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and smoking.

During Heart Month in February, the Prairie Heart and Vascular Institute at HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital reminds everyone to be aware of these risk factors and take proactive steps to ensure a healthy heart.

Top Three Risk Factors for Heart Disease

1. High blood pressure is a medical condition that occurs when the pressure of the blood in your arteries and blood vessels is too high. The high pressure, if not controlled, can affect your heart and other major organs of your body, including your kidneys and brain. High blood pressure is often called a “silent killer” because many people do not experience symptoms. Lowering blood pressure by changes in lifestyle or by medication can reduce the risk of heart disease and heart attack.

2. High cholesterol is the term used for high levels of low-density lipoprotein, or LDL. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance made by the liver or found in certain foods. Your liver makes enough for your body's needs, but we often get more cholesterol from the foods we eat. If we take in more cholesterol than the body can use, the extra cholesterol can build up in the walls of the arteries, including those of the heart. This leads to narrowing of the arteries and can decrease the blood flow to the heart, brain, kidneys and other parts of the body. A blood test can detect the amount of cholesterol and triglycerides in your blood.

3. Smoking can damage the heart and blood vessels, which increases your risk for heart conditions such as atherosclerosis and heart attack. Also, nicotine raises blood pressure,

and carbon monoxide reduces the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry. Exposure to other people's secondhand smoke can increase the risk for heart disease – even for nonsmokers.

Other risk factors for heart disease include diabetes, an unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, obesity and excessive alcohol consumption.

For more information about Prairie Heart and Vascular Institute at HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital, visit <https://www.steliz.org/heart>.