

# **Family History and Other Characteristics That Increase Risk for Heart Disease**

Heart disease can run in your family.

Family members share genes, behaviors, lifestyles, and environments that can influence their health and their risk for disease. Heart disease can run in a family, and your risk for heart disease can increase based on your age, and your race, or ethnicity.

## **Genetics and Family History**

When members of a family pass traits from one generation to another through genes, that process is called heredity.

Genetic factors likely play some role in high blood pressure, heart disease, and other related conditions. However, it is also likely that people with a family history of heart disease share common environments and other potential factors that increase their risk.

The risk for heart disease can increase even more when heredity combines with unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as smoking cigarettes and eating an unhealthy diet.

Family health history is a record of the diseases and health conditions present in your family. Family health history is a useful tool for understanding health risks and preventing disease.

## Other Characteristics

Both men and women can have heart disease. Some other characteristics that you cannot control, like your age, sex, and race or ethnicity, can affect your risk for heart disease.

- **Age.** Your risk for heart disease increases as you get older.
- **Sex.** Heart disease was the number one killer of both men and women in 2013.
- **Race or ethnicity.** In 2013 heart disease was the leading cause of death in the United States for non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and American Indians.