



The Heart Truth® Discussion Guide #2 Risk Factors for Heart Disease

You have probably heard the saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This common proverb illustrates why learning about the risk factors for heart disease is so important. If we can decrease our risk factors, we can decrease our chance of developing heart disease. So what are those risk factors?

Unfortunately, there are some risk factors for heart disease that we cannot change, no matter how hard we try to lead a healthy lifestyle. Some of these risk factors are:

- ♥ Age—People age 55 and older are at increased risk for heart disease. 82% of people who die from coronary heart disease are 65 or older. For women, risk increases after menopause when levels of estrogen in the body drop (scientists still don’t know exactly how or why estrogen affects heart disease).
- ♥ Gender—Men have a greater risk for heart attacks than women. Heart disease also occurs earlier in life for men. Heart disease is not just a man’s disease, though. In fact, it is the #1 killer of women in the United States.
- ♥ Genetics—Some families have a genetic predisposition to heart disease. If you have a family history of heart disease, your risk is increased. Some races, such as African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians, Native Hawaiians, and some Asian Americans, are also more vulnerable to heart disease.

The good news is that some of the risk factors for heart disease can be controlled with a healthy lifestyle. Some of those risk factors are:

- ♥ Smoking—increases risk 2-4 times
- ♥ High blood pressure (hypertension)—makes the heart work harder and become stiffer
- ♥ High blood cholesterol—affected by age, sex, heredity, and diet
- ♥ Overweight/obesity—increased body fat means more fat can clog the heart’s arteries
- ♥ Physical inactivity—physical activity can decrease body fat, cholesterol, and blood pressure
- ♥ Diabetes—65% of people with diabetes die of heart or blood vessel disease

Discussion Questions and Activities:

- What are your risk factors for heart disease?
- Do you have modifiable risk factors, non-modifiable risk factors, or both?
- Pick one of your modifiable risk factors. What is one achievable change you can make to address this risk factor?

Adapted by Catherine Becker, Community Health Intern, UW-Extension, June 2011 from:

The Heart Truth® for Women: A Speaker’s Guide. *The Heart Truth®*. National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Revised December 2007. Information available at www.hearttruth.gov.

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American Heart Association, 2011. Information available at www.heart.org.

United States Department of Agriculture, 2011. Information available at www.choosemyplate.gov.

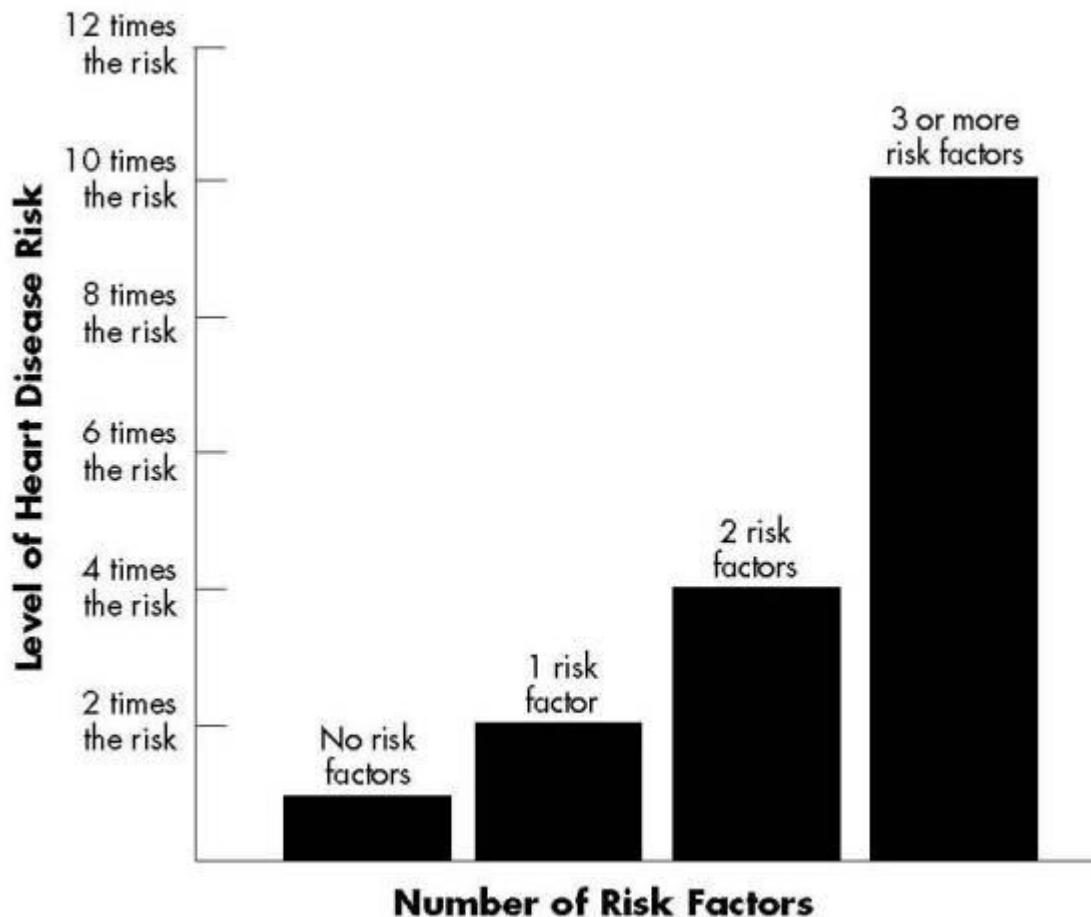
The content of this discussion guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute professional medical advice, diagnosis, treatment or recommendations of any kind. You should always seek the advice of your qualified health care professionals with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your individual needs and any medical conditions.

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HEART DISEASE RISK FACTOR "MULTIPLIER EFFECT" IN MIDLIFE WOMEN

Many women don't realize that their risk for heart disease significantly increases based on the number of risk factors they have.

This chart shows the dramatic rise in the level of heart disease risk for each added risk factor.



No risk factors equals 1 time the risk of heart disease

1 risk factor equals 2 times the risk of heart disease

2 risk factors equals 4 times the risk of heart disease

3 or more risk factors equals 10 times the risk of heart disease

The major controllable risk factors for heart disease are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, overweight/obesity, and physical inactivity.

To learn more, visit www.hearttruth.gov

Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2006)