



SEPTEMBER

# HEART AWARENESS MONTH



## HEART AWARENESS MONTH SEPTEMBER

### *TRUE LOVE NEVER DIES BUT MATTERS OF THE HEART ARE DELICATE*

This is true in every sense. The heart is a delicate but powerful organ that works as an engine in our bodies. Your heart is an amazing organ. It continuously pumps oxygen and nutrient-rich blood throughout your body to sustain life. This fist-sized powerhouse beats (expands and contracts) 100,000 times per day, pumping 5 or 6 quarts of blood each minute, or about 2,000 gallons per day.

September is dedicated to raising awareness about heart disease and its risk, and the importance of living a healthy lifestyle to prevent disease onset.

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### CAUSES OF HEART DISEASES

Heart disease includes a wide variety of conditions that can be caused by a wide variety of different factors. Most cases of heart disease develop due to gradual damage to the heart and the blood vessels. In this case, heart disease often does not have a single cause, but rather many factors that together increase the chance of heart damage and eventually results in heart disease. These factors that do not directly result in heart disease but contribute to its development are called risk factors. The more risk factors you have, and the more serious the individual ones are, the greater the chance of developing heart disease.

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### UNCONTROLLABLE RISK FACTORS

Some risk factors are out of your control but can still make heart diseases and strokes more likely. Even though you can't change them, you should still be aware and control what you can. The most common uncontrollable risk factors are:

**AGE** – Heart diseases become more likely with age.

**SEX** – Women are slightly protected against heart attack before menopause but then their risk increases afterwards. Women are also less likely to survive a heart attack and the signs of a heart attack may be less obvious.

**GENETIC** – Rare forms of inherited heart conditions, high cholesterol or blood pressure can increase the risk of heart disease and strokes.

**FAMILY HISTORY** – If your father or brother suffered heart disease before the age of 55, or your mother or sister before 65 years, then you could also be at increased risk.

**POVERTY** – Poverty can increase stress, anxiety, and depression. Healthy lifestyle choices could also not be affordable or available, and good medical treatment could be inaccessible. Therefore, poverty is an important risk factor for heart disease and strokes.

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## CONTROLLABLE OR PREVENTABLE RISK FACTORS

Controllable risk factors are factors that increase your risk of heart disease and stroke that you have the ability to change! Even small improvements in each of these can make a big difference.



**POLLUTION**



**STRESS**



**SMOKING**



**NUTRITION**



**ALCOHOL USE**



**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

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## 11 SIGNS YOU MIGHT HAVE HEART DISEASE

Will that pain wear off, or is it time to see your Doctor or even call an ambulance? British heart foundation professor David Newby highlights the 11 symptoms that you need to take seriously.

### 1 - Chest Pain

It's the classic sign of a heart attack, yet many people don't realise this could be a medical emergency. it's usually described as a heaviness, tightness, or pressure in the chest; people will often describe it as 'an elephant sat on my chest' or 'it felt like a tight band around my chest, that sort of constricting feeling. Seek medical attention.

### 2 - Feeling Sick

Obviously not every bout of nausea equals a heart attack – but if you're getting pain as well, alarm bells should ring. If you experience intense chest pain even when you are just sitting around doing nothing and you are also feeling sick, seek medical attention.

### 3 - Stomach Pain Or Indigestion

An indigestion-type pain or a burning sensation in your chest or stomach can be a sign of a heart attack or related heart problem. Because the heart, the gullet [the passage between your mouth and stomach] and the stomach are all lying right next to each other, the challenge, for both members of the public and doctors, is that a burning or indigestion-type pain and heart pain can be difficult to distinguish.

### 4 - Feeling Sweaty

Feeling hot and clammy along with chest pains is a sign that you should seek medical attention.

### 5 - Leg Pain

A gripping, cramping sensation in your calves when you are walking can be a marker of PAD (peripheral arterial disease). It's most common in smokers and people who have diabetes. Make an appointment with your GP.

### 6 - Arm Pain

You might not associate arm pain with your heart, but it can be a sign of a heart attack. If your pain is going down the arm, especially the left arm, or into the neck that makes it more likely to be heart-related than indigestion. If it doesn't go away, or if you know you have heart disease you should be seeking emergency medical advice.

### 7 - Jaw or Back Pain

Professor Newby says: "With heart attacks, it can even happen that the pain is felt in the jaw, or the back". Again, if it doesn't go away, seek medical attention.

### 8 - Choking Sensation

The word 'angina' means 'choking', and sometimes the tightness or pain can be up in the throat. People tend to describe a 'restricting' or 'choking' sensation. If the feeling continues, and you haven't previously been diagnosed with heart problem it might be safer to seek medical attention.

### 9 - Swollen Ankles

This shouldn't be ignored, especially if the ankles get big, as it can be a marker of heart failure, but it is also very common and has lots of other causes. It could just as easily be from tablets you are taking – for example, blood pressure medication can lead to swollen ankles. If you are getting swollen ankles, it's worth making an appointment with your GP.

## 10 - Extreme Fatigue

Feeling tired all the time can be a symptom of heart failure, as well as of other conditions. If you're tired and you've been working long hours or staying up late, it's probably not your heart – but if you start experiencing extreme tiredness and your lifestyle hasn't changed, it's a good idea to chat to your GP.

## 11 - Irregular Heartbeat

If your heart is going very fast and jumping around erratically then that's when you should see your GP. If you feel like this and then you experience blackouts, seek medical attention.

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## TREATING HEART DISEASE

Heart disease can be present at birth, develop gradually over many years, or happen suddenly and unexpectedly. For most types of heart disease, there are several treatment options available. Treatment can broadly be classified into medicines, devices, and surgery.

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## CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION (CPR)

Knowing what to do in an emergency can help to save a life. With more South Africans killed by heart disease every day and with an alarming increase in fatal drowning, it's important to know cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) a common and often lifesaving procedure.

Heart disease and strokes are the leading cause of death and disability in South Africa. According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa, 80% of heart diseases and strokes can be prevented.

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## WHAT IS CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION (CPR)?

CPR is an emergency lifesaving procedure that's performed when the heart stops beating. This is done until the circulation of blood and breathing in a person experiencing cardiac arrest can be restored. This lifesaving technique is very useful in many emergencies. including heart attacks or near-drownings where someone's breathing or heartbeat has stopped.

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## HOW TO PERFORM CPR

The following is an advisory illustration of CPR. Training by an accredited practitioner is advised.

You should take the following steps if you're in a situation that requires CPR:

- Check if the person is conscious or unconscious.
- If the person seems to be unconscious, tap or shake his or her shoulder and ask loudly. "Are you okay".
- If the person doesn't respond and 2 people are available, 1 should call an ambulance.
- If you're alone and have immediate access to a telephone, call the ambulance yourself before beginning CPR.
- If you think the person has become unresponsive because of suffocation (such as from drowning), begin CPR for 1 minute and then call an ambulance.

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## REFERENCES

(<https://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/high-cholesterol-healthy-heart>)

(<https://heartfoundation.co.za/>)

(<https://www.bhf.org.uk/>)

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