

## **Cardiovascular Disease - Know the risks and prevent becoming another statistic**

These days, we seem to be continuously bombarded with information on heart disease, heart attacks and stroke. What does all this mean, should we be concerned? And, who is at risk?

**Cardiovascular disease (CVD)** refers to any disease of the heart and blood vessels. The underlying cause of most CVD's is the gradual clogging up of the arteries (atherosclerosis) that supplies blood to the heart, brain and other vital organs.

**Coronary Heart Disease (CHD)** refers to disease of the arteries that supply the heart with oxygen. Clogging of these arteries leads to reduced blood flow to the heart which in turn leads to angina (pain or discomfort in the heart) or a heart attack!

**Stroke** is caused due to an interruption of blood flow to the brain, either by a ruptured blood vessel or a blockage by a blood clot. Brain cells begin to die off due to a lack of nutrient supply.

### ***Global & SA Trends***

CVD is seen to be a major health and economic burden throughout the world, especially in developed countries. By the year 2020, it is estimated that CHD will become the single leading public health problem. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, it is evident that Russia has the highest death rate from CVD followed by Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, Poland & Australia. The lowest death rate from CVD is evident in Japan, followed by France and then Canada. CVD has also plagued the Americans, revealing that it has been the leading cause of death since 1990. In America there is a coronary event almost every 29 seconds!

Looking at South African statistics, a heart attack occurs every 12 minutes! It is also estimated that, 1 in 3 men and 1 in 4 women will suffer from heart disease before age 60, about 130 heart attacks and about 240 strokes occur daily with a ¼ of these resulting in death! It is also interesting to note that the highest death rates for heart and blood vessel diseases in South Africa are found in Indian people, followed by the coloured people, while the white and black African people have the lowest rates. Major risk factors for heart disease include smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, physical inactivity and genetic inheritance (in the family).

September is Heart Awareness Month – an entire month dedicated to raising awareness of risk factors of heart disease and stroke. The Heart and Stroke Foundation is offering free blood pressure screenings country-wide - for more details or nutritional advice, contact the Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222 during office hours, or visit [www.heartfoundation.co.za](http://www.heartfoundation.co.za)

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