Heart Disease Education and Services

- Don’t smoke. If you smoke, sign up for a smoking cessation class.
- Limit alcohol consumption to no more than one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men.
- Eat a low-fat, low-sodium diet and add heart-friendly foods such as fish, whole grains, nuts, beans and a variety of fruits and vegetables to your diet.
- Manage stress by incorporating deep breathing exercises, physical activity or meditation into your day.
- Practice good dental hygiene by brushing your teeth daily and flossing regularly. See a dentist annually.
- Attend cardiac rehabilitation classes if you have suffered a heart attack or had coronary angioplasty or an open heart procedure.

Possible Complications
Heart failure and heart attack is linked to cardiovascular disease. Other complications of heart disease may include an aneurysm, peripheral artery disease, heart valve problems, stroke or sudden cardiac arrest. The best defense against these conditions is to work closely with your health care team, take prescribed medications, monitor your blood pressure and cholesterol, eat healthfully and exercise regularly.

Meritus Health Resources
- Congestive Heart Failure program 301-790-8944
- Cardiac Rehabilitation 301-790-8940
- Medication Assistance Center 301-393-3441
- Equipped for Life 301-714-0200
- Meritus Health Financial Counselor 301-790-8820
- Total Rehab Care 301-714-4025
- Cardiac Catheterization and Electrophysiology Labs
- Comprehensive Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit
- MeritusHealth.com/Events-Calendar

Additional Resources
- dhmh.maryland.gov/washhealth/Pages/wellness-promotion
- American Heart Association’s Risk Tool heart.org/mylifecheck.

Sources: American Heart Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Do you need a primary care physician? Go to Meritushealth.com/MMG to find a primary care provider close to you.
Heart Disease

**What is Heart Disease?**
Heart disease refers to conditions that can affect how the heart works. Arteries supply blood to the heart muscle and brain. When there is a buildup of plaque containing cholesterol inside the artery walls, the arteries begin to narrow or become blocked resulting in a decrease in blood flow. This accumulation of plaque in the arteries can cause:

**Heart attack.** This condition occurs when blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked by a blood clot. The lack of blood flow or oxygen may cause part of the heart muscle to die.

**Heart failure,** or sometimes called congestive heart failure, means the heart is working, but it is not pumping enough blood to meet your body’s needs.

**Risk Factors**
You are at risk for developing heart disease if you have some of the risk factors below:
- Advancing age
- Family history of heart disease
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Unhealthy diet
- Tobacco use
- Obesity
- Lack of exercise
- Alcohol abuse
- Stress
- Poor dental hygiene

**Symptoms and Diagnosis**
Your physician may detect signs of heart disease before your symptoms occur; however, pay close attention to these warning signs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Heart Attack</th>
<th>Heart Failure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chest pain, feeling of fullness or</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncomfortable pressure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortness of breath</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain in the neck, jaw, throat or back</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightheadedness or dizziness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic coughing or wheezing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swelling of abdomen, legs, ankles and feet</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High heart rate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with men, women’s most common heart attack symptoms are chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain. If you experience any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately. A delay in receiving care after suffering a heart attack could mean lasting damage to your heart.

**Treatment Options**
Treatment for heart disease involves seeing your health care team periodically and taking prescribed medications. Your physician will decide the best treatment options, but some medications may include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medication</th>
<th>Heart Attack</th>
<th>Heart Failure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blood thinners</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol-lowering</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta blockers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE inhibitors</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angiotensin receptor blockers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diuretics</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coronary angioplasty may be required for some heart attack patients. The nonsurgical procedure opens up blocked or narrowed arteries.

**Managing Heart Disease Risk**
- Get regular medical checkups and have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked regularly.
- Control your blood pressure. Aim for less than 120/80 mm Hg.
- Lower your cholesterol. Total cholesterol should be less than 200 mg/dL.
- If you are diabetic, monitor your blood glucose level daily and aim for a hemoglobin A1c of 7 percent or less.
- If you are overweight, work with your physician to achieve gradual weight loss through diet and exercise.
- Get at least 30 minutes of exercise at least five days a week. Start slow and talk to your doctor about an exercise plan.