

Heart Disease Rate on the Rise

How we can reduce our risk now

Americans are being urged to reverse some concerning trends that could impact heart health for generations to come. A [study](#) recently published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors like diabetes, hypertension, and cholesterol imbalances will increase exponentially in the next four decades – also leading to a sharp increase in cardiovascular disease.

Researchers used data from a National Health and Nutrition Examination [Survey](#), combined with 2020 U.S. [Census counts](#) for years 2025-2060 to make these projections. Using these two data points, researchers estimated the rates of cardiovascular risk factors and rates of cardiovascular disease. They estimate that by the year 2060, compared with the year 2025, coronary heart disease will increase by 31%, heart failure by 33%, heart attacks will go up by 30%, and stroke by more than 34%.

"It's eye opening," remarks Darrel Gumm, M.D., an OSF HealthCare cardiologist and vice president of the OSF HealthCare cardiovascular service line. "And I think we, in the cardiology community, over the last 50-60 years have been seeing a steady decline in deaths from heart attack because of our rapid response to people who come in with a heart attack. So to now see that even though we're reducing the death rate, the total number is going to keep going up, it's a big deal."

These numbers, however, vary depending on race and ethnicity. Predicted cardiovascular risk factors and cardiovascular disease are generally expected to rise in racial and ethnic minorities, whereas its prevalence in the white population could decrease.

"These are populations that are underserved. So they're maybe not getting the early screening visits with a physician to be told, you know, 'Your sugar is too high; your blood pressure, your cholesterol is too high. You're a little bit overweight. We've got to work on this.' So they may not be getting those visits. And instead, they're finding out when it's a full blown disease, as opposed to very early on when there was really an opportunity to prevent it from becoming a full-blown disease," says Dr. Gumm.

One possible solution to this disparity, according to Dr. Gumm, involves education and outreach – both by health care providers and communities at large. This could include improving access to quality health care for at-risk individuals, along with educating people on cardiovascular risk factors.

"Education, outreach, and changing habits of people and families really could have a potential huge impact in the future," he says.

While some risk factors like family history and age cannot be controlled, eating healthily, exercising regularly and quitting smoking can all drastically reduce the risk of heart disease. Dr. Gumm recommends making healthy changes now, starting with learning your numbers.

"If we start prevention today, we then look at how that will have a ripple effect in the future," explains Dr. Gumm. "So number one is know your numbers. What's your blood pressure? What's your fasting glucose, your fasting blood sugar level? And what is your cholesterol count in your blood? And step on the scale - and be honest. Are you carrying a few pounds too many? So those are really big risk factors. And of course, if you're smoking, we got to quit smoking immediately."

Because the projection goes nearly four decades into the future, Dr. Gumm also recommends getting the entire family involved. Talk to kids about the importance of eating right, exercising and staying away from tobacco products. Taking these steps now can have a huge impact on our health and the health of future generations.

OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute provides a free online heart health profiler that can help you learn important information about your personal cardiovascular health and risk factors. Go to osfhealthcare.org/heart to learn more.