

Script – Print – Take it to heart: cardiovascular disease remains leading cause of death

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States. That's from a new [study](#) in *Circulation*, a journal published by the American Heart Association (AHA).

According to the AHA, 941,00 people died from heart disease in the U.S. in 2022. Cancer deaths are second followed by accidental deaths.

Nancy Dagefoerde is a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute who closely monitors these trends. While the findings weren't surprising, Dagefoerde says it's a great reminder to patients and clinicians that heart health remains a top priority.

"It gives us information to talk to our patients about and for the public to see things that they might want to work on," she says. "I think many people are concerned about other illnesses like cancer, but then we have these reports that tell us heart disease is still leading cause of death."

There are several risk factors for heart disease. The greatest risk is genetics, followed by threats that are preventable such as diabetes, high cholesterol and blood pressure, stress, lack of exercise and obesity. Nearly 47% of U.S. adults have high blood pressure, 57% have Type 2 diabetes or prediabetes and 42% have obesity.

And the risks impact all ethnicities, but some more than others. "For example, many Hispanics are higher risk for diabetes," says Dagefoerde. "African American women tend to have higher risk for obesity and hypertension. So, we really need to target those risks and realize that these are some things that we can work on to prevent that risk."

There is, however, some good news. High cholesterol rates have declined over the past few years. Dagefoerde credits that to more awareness about diet and lifestyle factors, as well as medications used to control cholesterol. And smoking rates are also on the decline. That includes both cigarettes and e-cigarette use.

"I was pleased to see that the smoking rates and vaping rates were down, and not only for adults but teenagers," she says. "As for cholesterol, we have good treatment plans that are being utilized. Those are two very important things that are exciting."

While there has been some progress, experts warn that if recent trends continue, hypertension, obesity and diabetes will reach staggering numbers. This will greatly impact people's health as they age.

Dagefoerde adds that 80% of heart problems can be prevented. It starts by working on lifestyle issues – diet, exercise, sleep, no smoking and limit your alcohol consumption. It starts by educating yourself and working with your doctor to develop a plan.

"Bottom line, know your numbers, know your risks," Dagefoerde says. "If you have a family risk, then you're going to be more diligent with working on your risk factors. And when I say know your numbers, you want to know your blood pressure, your blood sugar and your cholesterol levels. Those are some things that you and your health care provider can work on and when they make recommendations, listen to them, ask questions and work together on a good treatment plan that you're comfortable with."

Because heart disease remains the number one killer, more reason everyone should know how to do CPR and be prepared to know where defibrillators are when you're at a public event. Download the [PulsePoint](#) app to see where defibrillators are located.

For more information on heart and vascular services, visit the [OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute](#) website.