

Heart Disease Remains Leading Cause of U.S. Deaths

Almost 60% of Black adults had some form of cardiovascular disease between 2017 and 2020, according to a new American Heart Association report.

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Heart disease remains the leading cause of death among Americans, according to a new American Heart Association (AHA) report [published in Circulation](#).

The report found that 941,652 Americans died of [heart disease](#) in 2022, an increase of more than 10,000 compared with the previous year.

There are a number of [cardiovascular](#) diseases (CVD). Some directly affect the heart's structure and ability to function. Others indirectly do so by making it harder for blood to circulate through the blood vessels. Although some people are born with heart or blood vessel defects, most problems occur as a result of lifestyle, age or diseases, such as [diabetes](#), [obesity](#) and high blood pressure ([hypertension](#)).

The report found racial and ethnic disparities. For instance, Black Americans have the highest prevalence of CVD. In fact, 59% of non-Hispanic Black women and 58.9% of non-Hispanic Black men had some form of CVD between 2017 and 2020.

According to the report, nearly 72% of U.S. adults have an unhealthy weight and almost 42% have obesity. Excess weight contributed to as many as 1,300 additional deaths per day in the United States, almost 500,000 annually.

What's more, nearly 47% of U.S. adults have [high blood pressure](#), and more than half (57%) have type 2 diabetes or prediabetes, according [to the AHA](#).

Additionally, lifestyle factors such as [diet](#), [exercise](#) and [smoking](#) profoundly influence heart health.

Indeed, smoking is especially bad. [Tobacco](#) use has long been considered one of the leading preventable causes of death in the United States and worldwide.

Thankfully, smoking rates have been steadily declining among both adults and young adults, according to the report.

In [an accompanying editorial](#), however, corresponding author Dhruv Kazi, MD, head of health economics and associate director of the Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Center for Outcomes Research in Cardiology at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, noted that risk factors for CVD are expected to increase.

“Although we have made a lot of progress against cardiovascular disease in the past few decades, there is a lot more work that remains to be done,” Kazi wrote. “If recent trends continue, hypertension and obesity will each affect more than 180 million U.S. adults by 2050, whereas the prevalence of diabetes will climb to more than 80 million.”

He also emphasized the need for culturally relevant medical interventions among high-risk populations.

“Simply discovering breakthrough therapies isn’t going to be enough—we have to ensure that these therapies are accessible and affordable to people who need them most,” he wrote.

For more, read Real Health’s [Basics on Heart Health](#), which reads in part:

The main function of the heart is to pump blood through the body. Each day, this organ pushes about 10 pints of blood through the blood vessels in the body. When the heart pumps, the organ pushes blood into the lungs to load up on oxygen and then pumps this oxygen-rich blood through arteries in the blood vessels to all other parts of our bodies. Veins in the blood vessels take blood back to the heart so the organ can pump the blood back to the lungs to, once again, pick up oxygen and repeat the cycle.

As the engine that pumps blood to all parts of the body, a healthy heart is crucial to keeping us alive. But many diseases and conditions put your heart’s health at risk.

Those conditions include arrhythmia, high cholesterol levels, congenital heart disease, diabetes, heart attack, heart failure, high blood pressure, kidney disease, metabolic syndrome, obesity, peripheral artery disease (PAD) and stroke, among others. Heart disease, in turn, affects the body in many ways and can trigger other conditions, such as cognitive impairment

that can lead to Alzheimer's disease.

Today, cardiovascular disease (CVD)—including heart disease and stroke—is the leading cause of death in the United States. That's the bad news. The good news is that most forms of CVD can be treated and prevented.

Whether you've been diagnosed with a form of CVD or are taking steps to reduce your risk of heart problems, the most important thing is to educate yourself. Become informed about heart health and what you can do to minimize the risk factors involved.