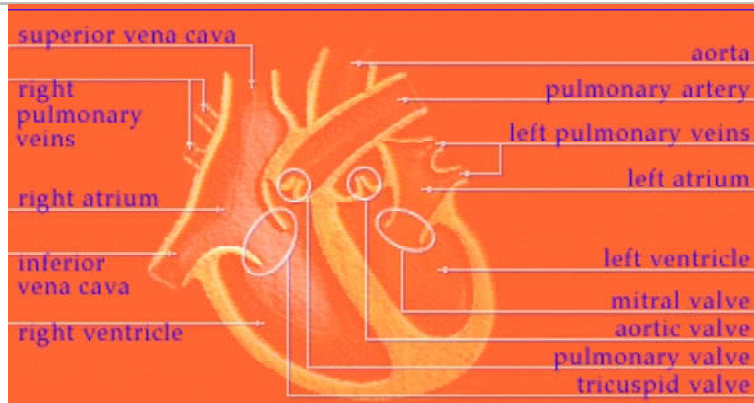


# Heart Information



The cardiovascular system comprises the heart, arteries, capillaries and veins. The adult heart is not much bigger than your fist, and lies in the center of the chest. A wall divides the heart cavity into "right" and "left" sides. Each side is divided again into an upper (atrium) and lower (ventricle) chamber. Valves regulate the flow of blood through the heart chambers.

The heart is really a double pump. The right side of the heart receives blood that has just returned from the body after delivering oxygen to the body tissues. It then pumps this dark, bluish-red blood to the lungs, where the blood rids itself of carbon dioxide (waste gas) and picks up a supply of oxygen. The left side of the heart then forces blood through the great trunk artery (aorta) and into smaller arteries, which distribute it to all parts of the body.

The heart pumps 5 quarts of blood each minute during rest. During exercise, the heart can pump up to 37 quarts each minute.

When an area of the heart muscle is deprived of blood (oxygen) for a prolonged period (usually 20 to 30 minutes) a heart attack can occur.

## **Warning signs of a heart attack:**

Chest discomfort is the most important signal of a heart attack. The pain may be located in the center of the chest or it may be throughout the front of the chest. The pain may be crushing, pressing or just a heavy feeling. It may spread to one (more often the left) or both shoulders and arms, or the neck, jaw, back or upper-mid portion of the abdomen.

## **Other symptoms may be:**

- Sweating
- Nausea

- Shortness of breath
- A feeling of weakness may accompany chest discomfort

## **Risk Factors:**

### **Risk Factors for a heart attack that cannot be changed:**

- Heredity
- Gender
- Age

### **Risk Factors for a heart attack that can be changed:**

- **Cigarette Smoking:** The heart attack death rate is considerably lower for non-smokers
- **High Blood Pressure:** People with mild elevations of blood pressure often begin treatment with a program of weight reduction, if overweight, and salt restriction in their diet.
- **High Blood Cholesterol Level:** Your cholesterol level can be measured by a simple test in your doctor's office. Treatment can be a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol. Medications to reduce cholesterol are also available.
- **Physical Inactivity:** Inactivity may lead to excess weight which increases your risk. Consult your physician before beginning an exercise program or before you significantly increase your exercise level if you are over 40 years of age.

**Source: American Cancer Society**

**ATTENTION:** This web page is intended to be used for health information ONLY. If you or a family member has a medical emergency, please call your doctor or 911, or your local emergency service number.