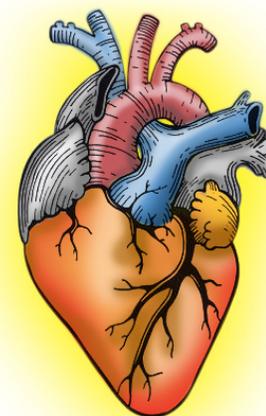


# At the Heart of the Matter: A Look at Cardiovascular Disease

## What is Cardiovascular Disease?

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the ‘umbrella’ term for all diseases that affect the heart (cardio) and blood vessels (vascular) of your body.<sup>1</sup> This group of disorders includes<sup>2</sup>:

- ▶ Coronary heart disease (CHD) or coronary artery disease (CAD)
- ▶ Peripheral arterial disease
- ▶ Rheumatic heart disease
- ▶ Congenital heart disease
- ▶ Cerebrovascular disease
- ▶ Pulmonary embolism



## Heart Disease vs Cardiovascular Disease... Is There a Difference?

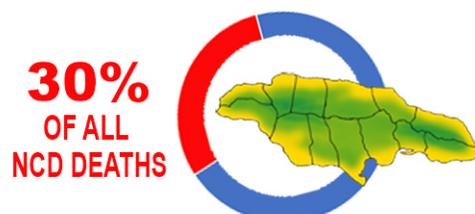
Because the terms sound so similar, people often use them interchangeably. *Heart disease* is a term used to describe a range of disorders that affect the heart. It includes diseases of the blood vessels associated with the heart, such as coronary heart disease, but it also includes disorders such as an abnormal heart rate or rhythm (heart arrhythmia), and defects in the structure of the heart that some people are born with (congenital heart disease).

Coronary artery disease is the most common form of heart disease and develops when the major blood vessels (coronary arteries) supplying the heart with oxygen, blood and nutrients are damaged or diseased.<sup>3,4</sup> It occurs when there is a build-up of fatty deposits inside the arteries, called *atherosclerosis*, and increases your risk of heart attacks.

In fact, when people talk about “heart disease” they often mean coronary heart disease.

Basically, *cardiovascular diseases* are different diseases affecting the structure or function of the heart or blood vessels. On the other hand, *heart disease* does not necessarily occur due to blocked blood vessels.

**Hard Fact:** *In Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, CVDs account for four of the five leading causes of death<sup>5</sup>. 30% of all NCD related deaths in Jamaica are caused by cardiovascular diseases<sup>6</sup>*



**Remember!**

**ALL Heart Diseases are Cardiovascular Diseases, but some Cardiovascular Diseases ARE NOT Heart Diseases.**

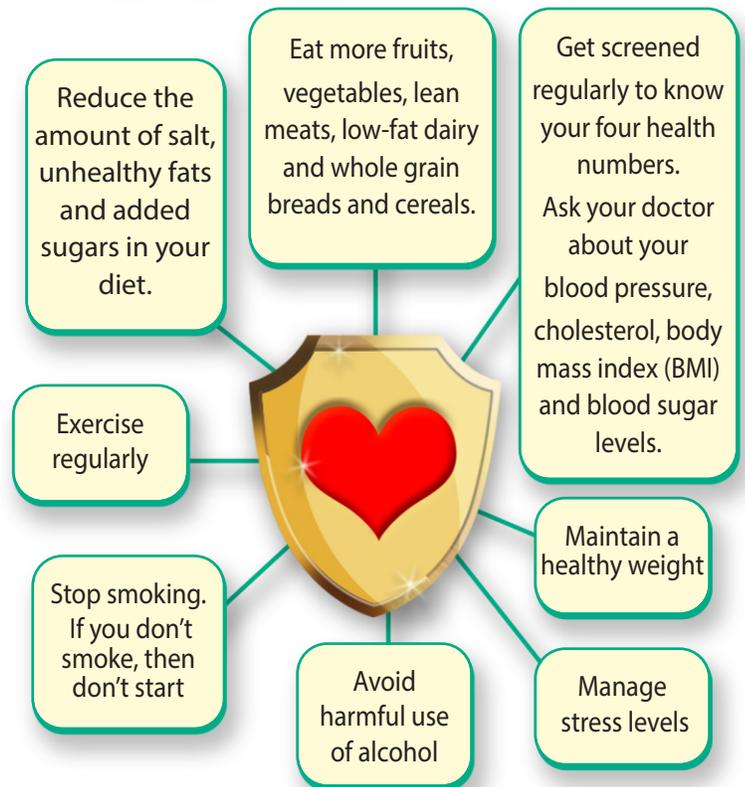
## Risk Factors for Cardiovascular Disease

While the direct causes of cardiovascular diseases are still unclear, there are numerous things that puts us at risk. The main risk factors are:

-  **High blood pressure and high cholesterol**
-  **Being overweight/obese**
-  **Diabetes**
-  **Family history of CVDs**
-  **Excessive alcohol consumption**
-  **Smoking**
-  **Age – most common in people over 50**
-  **Gender – men are more likely to develop CVD earlier than women**
-  **Diet – an unhealthy diet can lead to high cholesterol and high blood pressure**

## How Can I Protect Myself from Cardiovascular Disease?

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is key in reducing your risk of CVDs. There's a lot you can do to protect your heart, so begin now by incorporating these small changes to your daily lives.



At the heart of it all, health policies that create environments conducive to making healthy food and lifestyle choices available and affordable are essential for motivating people to adopt and sustain healthy behaviours.

***Remember, there is nothing sweeter than a healthy lifestyle!***

<sup>1</sup> American Heart Association. (2017, May 31). What is cardiovascular disease? [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org). Retrieved from <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/consumer-healthcare/what-is-cardiovascular-disease>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. (2021, June 11). Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs). World Health Organization. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cardiovascular-diseases-\(cvds\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cardiovascular-diseases-(cvds))

<sup>3</sup> National Health Service UK. (2018, September 17). Cardiovascular disease. NHS choices. Retrieved from <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cardiovascular-disease/>

<sup>4</sup> National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. (2021). Know the Differences: Cardiovascular Disease, Heart Disease, Coronary Heart Disease. NHLBI. Retrieved from [https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/media/docs/Fact\\_Sheet\\_Know\\_Diff\\_Design.508\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/sites/default/files/media/docs/Fact_Sheet_Know_Diff_Design.508_pdf.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, T. S., Younger-Coleman, N., Tulloch-Reid, M. K., Hambleton, I. R., Francis, D. K., Bennett, N. R., McFarlane, S. R., Bidulescu, A., MacLeish, M. Y., Hennis, A., Wilks, R. J., Harris, E. N., & Sullivan, L. W. (2017). Educational Health Disparities in Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors: Findings from Jamaica Health and Lifestyle Survey 2007-2008. *Frontiers in cardiovascular medicine*, 4, 28. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcvm.2017.00028>

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization. (2018). Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD) Country Profiles, 2018. WHO.int. Retrieved March 8, 2022, from [https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/jam\\_en.pdf](https://www.who.int/nmh/countries/jam_en.pdf)

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