

Heart Disease... Heart Failure.



What's the Difference?

Almost half of Americans are at risk for heart disease, and the numbers are rising. Heart disease is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of heart conditions, one of which is heart failure. Research suggests roughly 6.2 million U.S. adults have heart failure. While heart disease is a wide category, several elements of it impact heart failure.

In a nutshell, heart disease refers to several types of heart conditions while heart failure is a form of heart disease. Each type of heart disease is caused by something unique to that condition. The most common type of heart disease in the United States is coronary artery disease (CAD), which affects the blood flow to the heart and is at the root of heart failure.

Heart failure, or congestive heart failure, is a heart condition in which the heart cannot pump sufficient blood around the body. This may be due to the heart not filling with enough blood or it is too weak to pump correctly. Despite the name, it does not refer to the heart stopping.

Heart failure usually develops gradually. The heart muscle becomes weaker and has trouble pumping blood to nourish the cells in your body. It is a chronic condition that gradually gets worse. Sometimes heart failure comes on suddenly after a heart attack, as it weakens the heart's pumping ability. Heart failure symptoms may include coughing up white, pink, or foamy mucus, fatigue and weakness, irregular heartbeat, nausea, lack of appetite, shortness of breath when lying down or exerting energy or fluid retention in the abdomen or extremities.

Healthy lifestyle choices can help you prevent heart disease and, in turn, heart failure. They can also help you treat the condition and prevent it from getting worse. Your diet is one of the first areas that needs to change. Likewise, getting regular exercise, quitting tobacco and reducing alcohol consumption can help. As simple as it sounds, managing stress can also lower your risk for heart disease.

The diagnosis of heart disease or heart failure can both be frightening. If you have any symptoms, seek medical attention. Working quickly with your healthcare team can help you prevent complications and learn lifestyle changes to help your heart stay healthy.

If you are worried about your risk for heart disease, providers at West Tennessee Medical Group Cardiology can help. Learn more, or make an appointment by calling (731) 206-4145.

