

## February is American Heart Month

When talking about heart health, it can be confusing that the terms to describe heart-related diseases are used interchangeably. This might leave you with unanswered questions about your heart's health. Is there a difference between cardiovascular disease and heart disease? How bad can they really be? What should I do to protect myself from these illnesses?

A good starting point is understanding what these diseases even are. Cardiovascular disease is the umbrella term for all types of diseases affecting the heart or blood vessels. An easy way to think of it is: All heart diseases are cardiovascular diseases, but not all cardiovascular diseases are heart diseases. More than 800,000 people die every year due to cardiovascular disease in the United States alone, or one in every three deaths.

Now you might be thinking, what makes heart diseases different? Heart disease describes various conditions that affect the heart's structure and function, not blood vessels like cardiovascular disease. More than one in every ten American adults have been diagnosed with heart disease.

The most common type of heart disease is coronary heart disease (or coronary artery diseases) and is often what people are talking about when they say heart disease. Coronary heart disease occurs when plaque builds up in the arteries, reducing the amount of oxygen-rich blood leaving the heart and increasing the risk of blood clots and heart attack.

Now that you know what these terms mean, how can you keep your heart healthy? Here are some things the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute recommends you do to protect yourself from cardiovascular diseases:

- Ask your doctor about your blood pressure, cholesterol, and A1C.
- Reduce your sodium intake and increase the fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet.
- Be physically active (the American Heart Association recommends at least 2.5 hours per week).
- Control your weight.
- Don't smoke.
- Manage stress.

Visit The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/education-and-awareness/heart-month> and The American Heart Association at <https://www.heart.org/en> for tips, recipes, and to learn more so that you can keep your heart healthy and happy.