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## Heart Disease Health Center

### Heart Disease, Stroke Deaths Down

#### Still, Too Many Americans at High Risk for Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke, Researchers Say

By Katrina Woznicki  
WebMD Health News

Reviewed by [Elizabeth Klodas, MD, FACC](#)



Dec. 15, 2010 -- Fewer people are dying from cardiovascular disease and stroke since the late 1990s, but the economic toll remains high and the number of inpatient cardiovascular procedures performed to treat the illness has increased, according to a report.

Every year, the American Heart Association, in conjunction with the CDC, the National Institutes of Health, and other federal agencies, pools the latest data to see where the nation is in winning the war against cardiovascular disease, the number No. 1 in the U.S.

#### [A Visual Guide to Heart Disease](#)

#### Death Rate Down, but Costs Are High

According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease accounts for one death every 39 seconds in the U.S. There are more than 795,000 new or recurrent strokes every year. Coronary heart disease alone contributed to one in six deaths in the U.S. The cost of cardiovascular disease in both health expenditures and lost productivity stands at \$286 billion; more than the cost of cancer and benign tumors, which was estimated to cost \$228 billion.

Looking at data reported between 1997 and 2007, the most recent statistics available, investigators led by Veronique Roger, MD, MPH, chair of the health sciences research department at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., found that the death rate from heart disease dropped by 27.8% and the stroke death rate declined by 44.8%. The findings appear online in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

"We're seeing a decline in deaths for both, particularly for stroke," Roger says. "We can attribute much of that to improved quality of care, with heart and stroke patients getting the care and treatment they need to live longer. But unfortunately the prevalence of these diseases and their risk factors are still high. We need to energize our commitment to strategies that can prevent disease in the first place."

During the same period, the total number of inpatient cardiovascular operations and procedures increased 27%. The estimated total cost from heart disease and stroke in the United States for 2007 (including health expenditures and lost productivity) was \$286 billion. That's higher than any other diagnostic group. In 2008, the estimated cost of all cancer and benign tumors was \$228 billion, according to the update.

#### Lifestyle Behaviors Contribute to Cardiovascular Disease Burden

Roger and her team found that, overall, too many Americans live with major risk factors for cardiovascular disease and stroke, such as elevated blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, and being overweight and inactive. Among their findings:

More than two-thirds of the U.S. adult population is either clinically overweight or obese. This trend in adulthood obesity may not change given that during the past 30 years, obesity increased from 4% to 20% among children aged 6 to 11.

More than a third of Americans aged 20 and older have high blood pressure; 80% are aware of their condition, but less than half have their condition under control.

Smoking is also a major risk factor; 23.1% of adult men and 18.1% of adult women smoke cigarettes. And 19.5% of high school students say they use tobacco.

15% of adults 20 and older have total serum cholesterol levels of 240 mg/dL or higher. The recommend level is 200 mg/dL or lower.

8% of the U.S. adult population have diabetes; 36.8% have prediabetes, in which their blood sugar levels

are too high, though not high enough to meet the definition of diabetes.

Death rates from cardiovascular disease remain significantly higher for black males, at 405.9 per 100,000 compared with 286.1 per 100,000 for black females, 294 per 100,000 for white males, and 205.7 per 100,000 for white females.

**Lifestyle Behaviors Contribute to Cardiovascular Disease Burden continued...**



Over the next decade, the American Heart Association is focused on reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20%.

“Our baseline data related to the 2020 goal in the new update indicate the need for substantial progress in order to meet those goals in the next decade,” Roger says. “To achieve improvements in cardiovascular health, all segments of the population will need to focus on improved cardiovascular health behaviors, particularly with regard to diet and weight, as well as increasing physical activity and further reducing the prevalence of smoking.”

The report, for the first time, includes data about family history and genetics. Having a sibling who has heart disease, or a parent who has experienced a heart attack at an early age, essentially doubles one’s risk of developing heart disease. “The role of genetic factors in the risk of cardiovascular disease will likely be a growing part of the report in the future,” Roger says.

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**SOURCES:**

American Heart Association.  
 News release, American Heart Association.  
 Roger, V. *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.  
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