



# Heart Disease

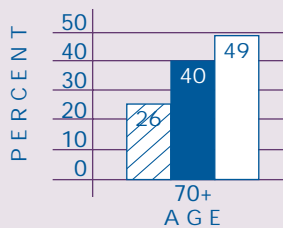
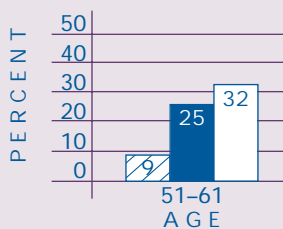
*A disabling yet preventable condition*

Almost 18 million people—7 percent of all Americans—have heart disease. More than half of the population with heart disease is under age 65. Older people are affected by heart disease to a much greater extent, however. The elderly are more likely to have coronary heart disease, commonly known as a heart attack or chest pain, which is more debilitating than other types of heart disease. Yet many forms of heart disease are largely preventable. Controlling conditions, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, and engaging in a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of heart disease.

## HEART DISEASE LIMITS ACTIVITY

Proportion of people limited in activities of daily living

WITHOUT HEART DISEASE  
WITH HEART DISEASE  
WITH CORONARY HEART DISEASE



SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1992 Health and Retirement Study and the 1993 study of Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old.

**S**ome people with heart disease do not have any difficulty on a daily basis. On the whole, however, those with heart disease are more limited in their activities, including work.

- Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of premature, permanent disability in the U.S. labor force.
- Labor force participation is lower for the population with heart disease compared to the population without it.
- Workers who are limited by heart disease earn less than workers without heart disease.

## Heart disease is particularly limiting for older adults

Differences in activity level for those with and without heart disease are substantial. Adults with heart disease are much more likely to have difficulties with activities of daily living, or ADLs, such as bathing, dressing, eating, using the toilet, walking, and getting into and out of bed. Difficulties are most common among older age groups. Among those with coronary heart disease, about one-third of those age 51 to 61 and about half of those age 70 and older have difficulty with one or more ADL.

# Who has heart disease?

Among the population with heart disease, the proportions of elderly people, whites, and people with less education and low incomes are higher than in the general population. The proportion of people in these groups is even higher for the population with coronary heart disease (see Figure 1).

- The elderly have a higher rate of heart disease than any other age group.
- Across all age groups, rates of heart disease in men and women are similar. In older age groups, however, heart disease strikes more men than women.
- Whites are more likely to develop coronary heart disease than other races. Blacks, however, are more likely to die from heart disease. The gap in the heart disease death rate between blacks and whites has widened since the 1980s.<sup>1</sup>
- Individuals with less than a high-school education are more likely to have heart disease than individuals with a high-school education or more. The risk of death from coronary heart disease is also much greater for the least-educated than for the most-educated people.<sup>2</sup>

- Because educational attainment and income are often related, it is not surprising that those at lower income levels are more likely to develop heart disease than those at higher income levels.

## WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

Heart disease is a type of cardiovascular disease. In addition to heart disease, the term cardiovascular disease encompasses a variety of heart conditions, such as high blood pressure and stroke.

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is caused by a narrowing of the coronary arteries, which results in a decreased supply of blood and oxygen to the heart. CHD includes myocardial infarction, commonly referred to as a heart attack, and angina pectoris, or chest pain. A heart attack is caused by the sudden blockage of a coronary artery, usually by a blood clot. And chest pain occurs when the heart muscle does not receive enough blood.

Another type of heart disease is a heart rhythm disorder, which includes rapid heart, heart murmurs, and other unspecified disorders.

Congestive heart failure (CHF), which is often the end-stage of heart disease, is another disease of the heart.

**FIGURE 1**  
*Description of Three Populations*

		GENERAL POPULATION (%)	POPULATION WITH HEART DISEASE (%)	POPULATION WITH CORONARY HEART DISEASE (%)
AGE	0-17	27	7	<1
	18-64	61	50	42
	65+	12	43	58
GENDER	MALE	49	48	59
	FEMALE	51	52	41
RACE	WHITE	83	88	91
	BLACK	13	9	7
EDUCATION	<HIGH SCHOOL	20	30	34
	HIGH SCHOOL+	80	70	66
INCOME	<\$20,000	24	34	36
	\$50,000+	23	15	10

SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1994 National Health Interview Survey.

## People with heart disease are less healthy

Over half—61 percent—of the population with heart disease reports being in good to excellent health compared to 92 percent of the population without heart disease. Relative to younger population groups, smaller proportions of older adults generally report their health as good to excellent. Regardless of age, however, adults with heart disease are less likely to report their health as good to excellent and more likely to report their health as fair to poor than adults without heart disease (see Figure 2).

Individuals with heart disease are more likely to stay in bed due to an illness or

for people with coronary heart disease. Over three-quarters—76 percent—of the population with coronary heart disease have been hospitalized for this disease.

Among the population age 70 and older, those with heart disease are more likely to use prescription drugs and other services, including a social worker, adult day care, rehabilitation, transportation, or Meals on Wheels, than those without heart disease.

## Family provides much of the care needed by elders with heart disease

Two out of five people age 70 and older with heart disease need assistance with their ADLs. Spouses, children, and grandchildren provide 65 percent of the help that is needed (see Figure 3). Children and grandchildren also provide 70 percent of the assistance needed by this same group to perform instrumental activities of daily living, or IADLs, including day-to-day finances, savings and investments, and major decisionmaking.

FIGURE 2

*Proportion of the Population Reporting Good to Excellent or Fair to Poor Health, by Age*

	GOOD TO EXCELLENT (%)	FAIR TO POOR (%)
<b>AGE 51 TO 61</b>		
With heart disease	57	43
Without heart disease	86	14
<b>AGE 70 AND OLDER</b>		
With heart disease	51	49
Without heart disease	78	22

SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1994 National Health Interview Survey.

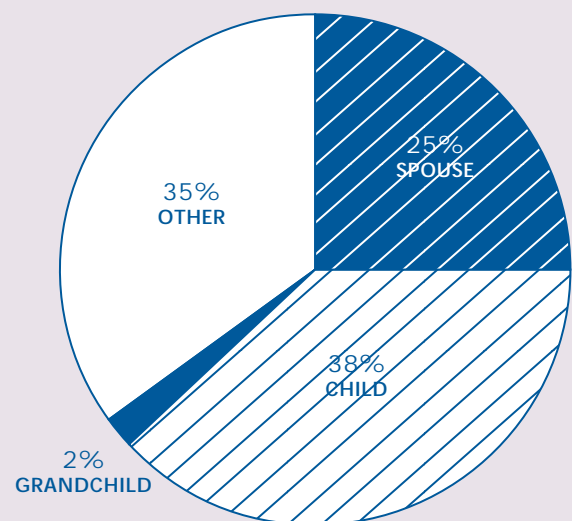
impairment than individuals without heart disease. The proportion of people with heart disease who report spending five or more days in bed in the past year is more than twice that of people without heart disease. Almost two million people report spending five or more days in bed in the past year due to their heart disease.

## Health care service use is greater for those with heart disease

Annual physician visits and hospitalization rates are higher for those with heart disease compared to those without. Hospitalization rates are particularly high

FIGURE 3

*Caregivers of People Age 70+ with Heart Disease and in Need of Help with Activities of Daily Living*



SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1993 study of Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old.

## A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF HEART DISEASE

A healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of heart disease by as much as 80 percent.<sup>3</sup> People who are not overweight, do not smoke, consume about one alcoholic drink a day, exercise vigorously for 30 minutes a day or more, and eat a low-fat, high-fiber diet have the lowest risk for heart disease. Heart disease is largely preventable by virtue of a healthy lifestyle—it doesn't have to be the number one killer of Americans.

## People with heart disease are more likely to become depressed

Among 51 to 61 year olds, the proportion of those with heart disease that experienced four or more symptoms of depression in the past week—14 percent—is almost three times that of those without heart disease—5 percent. The impact of depression on people with heart disease can be severe, particularly for those who have a heart attack. Depression is a significant predictor of death 12 months after experiencing a heart attack.<sup>4</sup> Differences in self-reported emotional health status are also great between those with and without heart disease. Among 51 to 61 year olds, over one-third—34 percent—of those with heart disease, compared to just 16 percent of those without heart disease, rate their emotional health as fair to poor.

## Heart disease affects retirement decisions

There are striking differences in the retirement status of people age 51 to 61 with and without heart disease (see Figure 4). Heart disease appears to be a factor that pushes people toward early retirement, and reduces satisfaction with retirement.

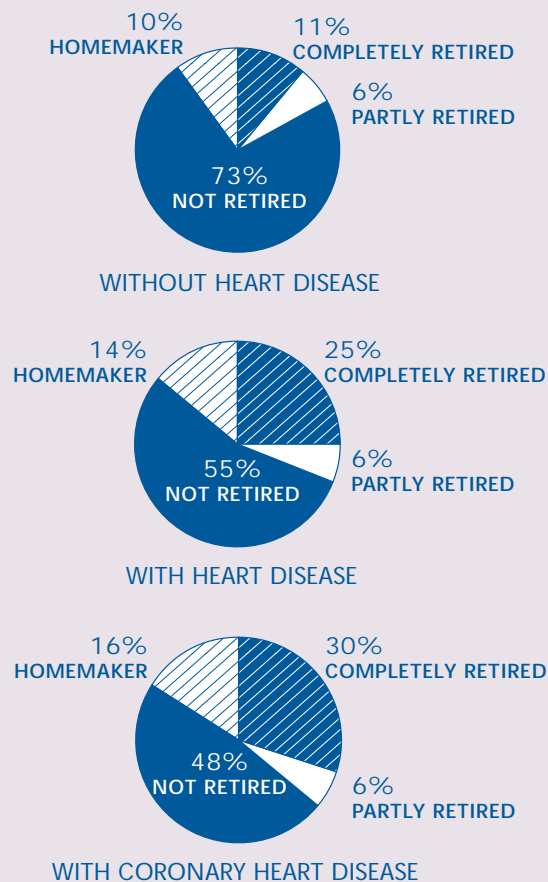
Health is often a strong factor in retirement decisions, particularly for those with

heart disease. Some 76 percent of people with heart disease report that poor health was a very important factor in their decision to completely retire. Among those without heart disease, only 39 percent report poor health as a very important factor.

Given the importance of health in the decision to retire, it is not surprising that many people with heart disease did not want to retire. Only 16 percent of those with heart disease who are completely retired wanted to retire, whereas 47 percent of those without heart disease who are completely retired wanted to retire.

Satisfaction with retirement is much lower for those with heart disease than for those without. While only one-fifth of those with heart disease are very satisfied with their retirement, almost half—46 percent—of those without the disease are very satisfied.

FIGURE 4  
*Retirement Status of People Age 51 to 61*



SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1992 Health and Retirement Study.

## Coronary heart disease is the leading cause of premature, permanent disability in the U.S. labor force

Disability for U.S. workers with heart disease is high.<sup>5</sup> They are more limited in the type or amount of work they can do compared to those without heart disease. More than one-fifth—22 percent—of workers with heart disease have work limitations, compared to just 8 percent of workers without heart disease.

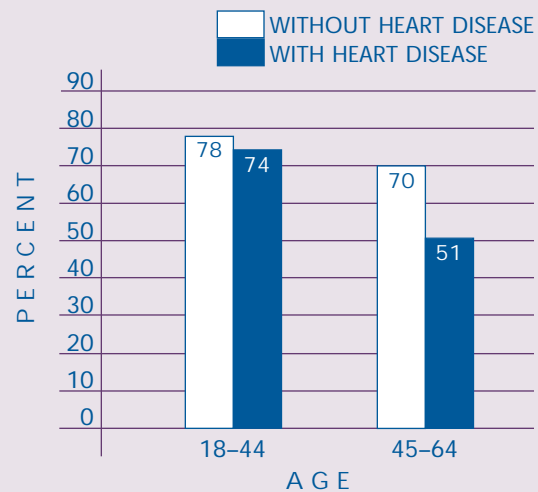
Coronary heart disease is particularly disabling. Among workers age 51 to 61, for example, some 44 percent of those with heart disease and 56 percent of those with coronary heart disease report that their condition is the cause of a limitation in the type or amount of paid work they can do. Almost 500,000 people of working age who are not working report that coronary heart disease causes limitations in their ability to work. Coronary heart disease accounts for 19 percent of disability allowances by the Social Security Administration.<sup>6</sup>

## Labor force participation is lower for the population with heart disease

Employment rates for those with and without heart disease are strikingly similar for younger age groups. Differences surface among older populations, however. Only about half of 45 to 64 year olds with heart disease work, compared to 70 percent of people in that age group who do not have heart disease (see Figure 5).

Workers with heart disease miss more work compared to workers without the disease. Some 12 percent of workers age 18 to 64 with heart disease compared to only 6 percent of workers in that age group without heart disease report missing a day or more of work in a two-week period. Some 140,000 adults age 18 to 64 report missing a day or more of work in a two-week period due to heart disease.

FIGURE 5  
*Employment Status of the Working-Age Population With and Without Heart Disease*

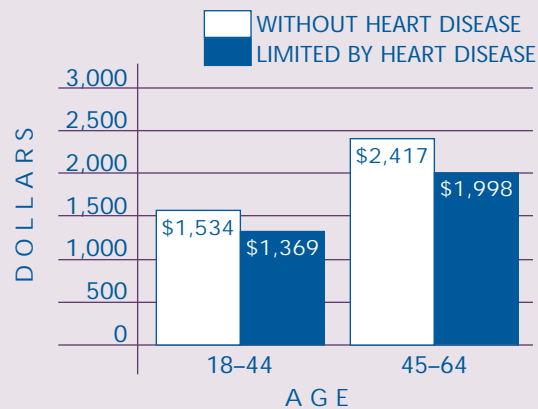


SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1994 National Health Interview Survey.

## Workers with heart disease earn less

Differences in monthly earnings between workers with and without heart disease are fairly large, particularly among older adults who are limited in their ADLs (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6  
*Median Monthly Earnings for Workers With and Without Heart Disease*



SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1993 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation.

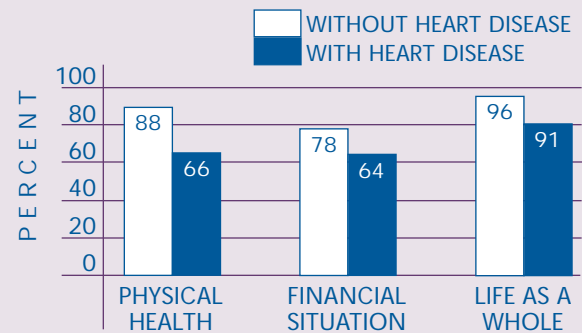
## People with heart disease are less satisfied

People with heart disease are less satisfied with their “life as a whole” than those without heart disease. Factors that may contribute to this difference include health and finances; people with heart disease are much less satisfied than those without heart disease with respect to both factors (see Figure 7). However, this is not surprising given that individuals with heart disease are, in general, less healthy and less wealthy than individuals without heart disease. For example, among 51 to 61 year olds, the median net worth for those with heart disease is \$69,775, compared to \$100,000 for those without heart disease.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1998). Trends in ischemic heart disease death rates for blacks and whites—United States, 1981–1995. *Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*; 47(44): 945–949.
2. American Heart Association. (1998). *1999 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update*. Dallas, TX: American Heart Association.
3. Hu, F. (1999). Findings from the Nurses’ Health Study presented at the 72nd Scientific Sessions of the American Heart Association, Atlanta, GA, November 8.
4. Kaufmann, M., J. Fitzgibbons, E. Sussman, J. Reed, J. Einfalt, J. Rodgers, and G. Fricchione. (1999). Relation Between Myocardial Infarction, Depression, Hostility, and Death. *American Heart Journal*; 138(3): 549–554.
5. American Heart Association. (1998).
6. Ibid.

FIGURE 7

*Proportion of People Age 51 to 61 Satisfied with Various Aspects of Life*



SOURCE: National Academy on an Aging Society analysis of data from the 1992 *Health and Retirement Study*.

## ABOUT THE DATA

This *Profile* presents descriptive data about people who reported having any of the following types of heart disease: coronary heart disease, heart rhythm disorders, and other diseases of the heart. Unless otherwise noted, the data are from four national surveys of the community-dwelling population in the United States. The 1994 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, provides data for the entire population, including children. The 1993 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) was conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and provides data for the population age 18 to 84. Wave 1 of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) provides information on a population age 51 to 61 in 1992. Wave 1 of the study of Asset and Health Dynamics Among the Oldest Old (AHEAD) provides information about respondents age 70 and older in 1993 and 1994. Both the HRS and AHEAD data sets were sponsored by the National Institute on Aging and conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

## ABOUT THE *PROFILES*

This series, *Challenges for the 21st Century: Chronic and Disabling Conditions*, is supported by a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This *Profile* was written by Lee Shirey with assistance from Greg O’Neill and Laura Summer. It is the third in the series. Previous *Profiles* include:

1. Chronic Conditions: A challenge for the 21st century
2. Hearing Loss: A growing problem that affects quality of life

The National Academy on an Aging Society is a Washington-based nonpartisan policy institute of The Gerontological Society of America. The Academy studies the impact of demographic changes on public and private institutions and on the economic and health security of families and people of all ages.



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