

## *Quick facts*

### Global

- CVDs are the number 1 cause of death globally. An estimated 17.5 million people died from CVDs in 2012, representing 31% of all global deaths.

### South-East Asia Region

- Cardiovascular diseases including coronary heart disease and stroke cause an estimated 3.7 million deaths or a quarter of all deaths annually in the Region (2.0 million among males and 1.7 million among females)
- 38% of all deaths due to cardiovascular diseases in the Region occur before the age of 70 years

## What are cardiovascular diseases?

Cardiovascular diseases are a group of disorders of the heart or blood vessels, and include mainly hypertensive heart disease, ischaemic heart disease, rheumatic heart disease and cerebrovascular disease or strokes.

## What are the causes of cardiovascular diseases?

Tobacco use, an unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes. These poor lifestyle choices can lead to metabolic risk factors such as overweight and obesity, high blood pressure, high blood sugar and high blood cholesterol. These become important, yet preventable risk factors for heart attacks and strokes.

## What are some typical symptoms of cardiovascular diseases?

People may either experience symptoms of underlying cardiovascular disease years before a heart attack or stroke, or none at all. The most common symptoms are:

- chest pain or discomfort which may last for several minutes
- shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing
- tiredness and weakness
- pounding or racing heartbeat.
- swelling of the ankles, feet, legs or abdomen.
- excessive sweating.

## How are cardiovascular diseases diagnosed and managed?

Depending on the disease type, a combination of methods may be used to diagnose cardiovascular diseases. These include auscultation, blood tests to determine the levels of blood fats (lipids), particularly cholesterol and triglycerides, and electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG), chest X-ray, exercise stress tests, imaging tests and angiocardiology, among others. High-risk individuals and those with established cardiovascular disease can be treated with regimens of low-cost generic medicines that significantly reduce the likelihood of death or vascular events. A regimen of aspirin, statin and blood pressure-lowering agents could significantly reduce heart attacks and strokes. Those with established cardiovascular diseases may require surgical interventions.



*Cardiovascular diseases are the largest killers — annually claiming 17.5 million lives globally (68% of all deaths) and 3.7 million lives in SEAR*

## What can be done to prevent cardiovascular disease?

Nearly 80% of premature heart attacks and strokes are preventable. Primary prevention of heart disease and stroke is achievable through no-/low-cost simple interventions, such as physical activity, healthy diet, tobacco cessation and avoiding harmful use of alcohol. For people aged 40–79 years and who are at high cardiovascular risk, a regimen of aspirin, statin and blood pressure-lowering agents taken on medical advice has been estimated to avert significant number of premature deaths.

### *What individuals can do?*

- Do not use tobacco products. If you are already using tobacco, quit immediately.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables and limit intake of salt, sugar and saturated fats.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight by engaging in regular physical activity (do at least 30 minutes of regular, moderate-intensity activity everyday).
- Avoid harmful use of alcohol.
- Prevent and control high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes.

### *What communities can do?*

- Create and maintain safe neighbourhoods for physical activity and improve access to parks and playgrounds.
- Advocate for quality physical education in schools and childcare facilities.

### *What the private sector can do?*

- Voluntarily reduce salt and saturated fat content in processed foods.
- Eliminate artificially produced trans fats in the food supply chain.
- Ensure that healthy and nutritious choices are available and affordable to all consumers.
- Avoid marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans fats, free sugars or salt to children.
- Promote healthy food choices and support regular physical activity practice at the workplace.

### *What governments can do?*

- Create large-scale public awareness about diet and physical activity through mass media and other means.
- Create policy measures and ensure supportive environments that facilitate easy availability, affordability, accessibility and desirability of health-promoting foods at the grassroots level.
- Enact legislation to tax unhealthy foods and subsidize locally produced fruits and vegetables.
- Ensure cost-effective clinical interventions for early detection and reduction of risk factors in individuals at high risk.
- Implement awareness about hypertension with a multi-sectoral approach including functionaries, such as nongovernmental organizations, schools, media and health officials.
- Enforce regulations for control of tobacco use and ban its marketing and advertising.
- Promote healthy policies, such as for tobacco and alcohol control and enhancing healthy diets and physical activity.