

The Silent Killer



It's a classic whodunit. A disease inside your body kills more American men and women than any other cause of death. Is it pneumonia? Not quite. Cancer? Getting closer. Heart attacks? Almost there!

The #1 killer for Americans is cardiovascular (heart and blood vessel) disease, beating out cancer, lung disease, accidents, and Alzheimer's disease. Cardiovascular disease is also the world's top killer, claiming the lives of almost 18 million people in 2015. [Check out these facts](#) about heart disease from the American Heart Association.

February is **Heart Month**, and a good time to take a closer look at how well you are doing at being heart-healthy. A serious risk factor for cardiovascular disease is high blood pressure, known as hypertension. High blood pressure puts too much force against the arteries when the heart contracts, causing the heart to work too hard and damaging blood vessels over time.

Hypertension has been dubbed "the silent killer" because people often don't have obvious signs that something is wrong. High blood pressure is the second-leading cause of preventable death from heart disease, and it is steadily rising.

The American Heart Association recently established new guidelines for hypertension. The old standards were readings of 140/90 mmHg or higher. **The new guidelines consider measurements of 130/80 mmHg to be Stage I Hypertension.** With the [new guidelines](#), nearly half of all adults in the United States have high blood pressure—that's an estimated 103 million Americans!

It's important to [KNOW ALL YOUR NUMBERS](#): Critical health screens are often an early sign of beginning disease, and **blood pressure is only one of these.**

The good news is that death from this silent killer is **preventable**. Adapting a healthy lifestyle can significantly reduce your risk of heart disease. Lifestyle changes include getting the recommended 30 minutes of moderate activity for 5 days/week, following established nutritional guidelines, quitting smoking, and taking blood pressure medication if needed.

Hypertension doesn't have to be a lethal killer. Make this **Heart Month** the time when you make a change toward health. Contact your healthcare provider for information regarding your risk for heart disease and what you can do about it.