

FitFacts[®]



Using the Framingham risk score to predict risk for heart attack

HEART ATTACKS ARE A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH AND DISABILITY FOR MEN AND WOMEN. IN FACT, EVERY 34 SECONDS SOMEONE IN THE UNITED STATES HAS ONE! KNOWING YOUR RISK IS THE FIRST STEP IN MAKING SURE THAT YOU WON'T BE A STATISTIC. THE FRAMINGHAM RISK SCORE, A SIMPLE RISK CALCULATOR, IS A GREAT PLACE TO START.

FIRST OF ALL, WHAT IS A HEART ATTACK?

The heart is a muscle that needs a steady supply of oxygen-rich blood in order to function. When blood flow to the heart muscle is restricted or completely blocked, it becomes permanently damaged or stops working altogether. This severe damage or death of the heart muscle is called a heart attack or a myocardial infarction (MI).

Though a heart attack happens within a very short window of time, it actually takes many years for blood flow to the heart muscle to become blocked. Just like a pipe gets clogged over time, the arteries that bring blood to the heart can get clogged up with a waxy substance made up of fat and cholesterol (also called a “plaque”). Anything that makes these plaques develop and grow is considered a risk factor for a heart attack.

KNOW YOUR RISK

What risk factors do you have? It's important to know so you can take action. The Framingham risk score uses the following risk factors identified from the Framingham Heart Study to predict your chance of having a heart attack within the next 10 years.

- Age
- Gender
- Cigarette smoking
- High blood pressure (140/90 or greater or taking blood pressure medication)
- High total cholesterol (>200 mg/dL)
- Low HDL cholesterol (<40 mg/dL)

WHO SHOULD USE THE FRAMINGHAM RISK SCORE?

A Framingham score is useful for anyone who is 20 years of age and older and does not already have heart disease or diabetes. This is because a person with heart disease and/or diabetes is already known to be at high risk for a heart attack.

You can [access the calculator here](#).

WHAT DOES THE SCORE MEAN?

A Framingham score is a percentage that falls into one of three categories. This percentage is the chance that you will have a heart attack in the next 10 years:

- Low risk—less than 10%
- Medium risk—10 to 20%
- High risk—over 20%

This score can help your healthcare provider decide the best way for you to lower your risk of a heart attack. You may be advised to make certain changes to your lifestyle, take medication, or do both depending on your level of risk.

Remember that no matter what your percentage is, embracing an active lifestyle and eating a healthy diet are the most important ways to reduce your risk for a heart attack (and so many other disabling conditions, too!).

Are you ready to make a change? ACE wellness offerings include a number of [tools and calculators](#) to help you meet your health and fitness-related goals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[American Heart Association](#).

[National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. \(2013\). Risk assessment tool for estimating your 10-year risk of having a heart attack.](#) Retrieved on October 25, 2013.