SEPTEMBER 2015

CDC Vitalsigns™

Heart Age

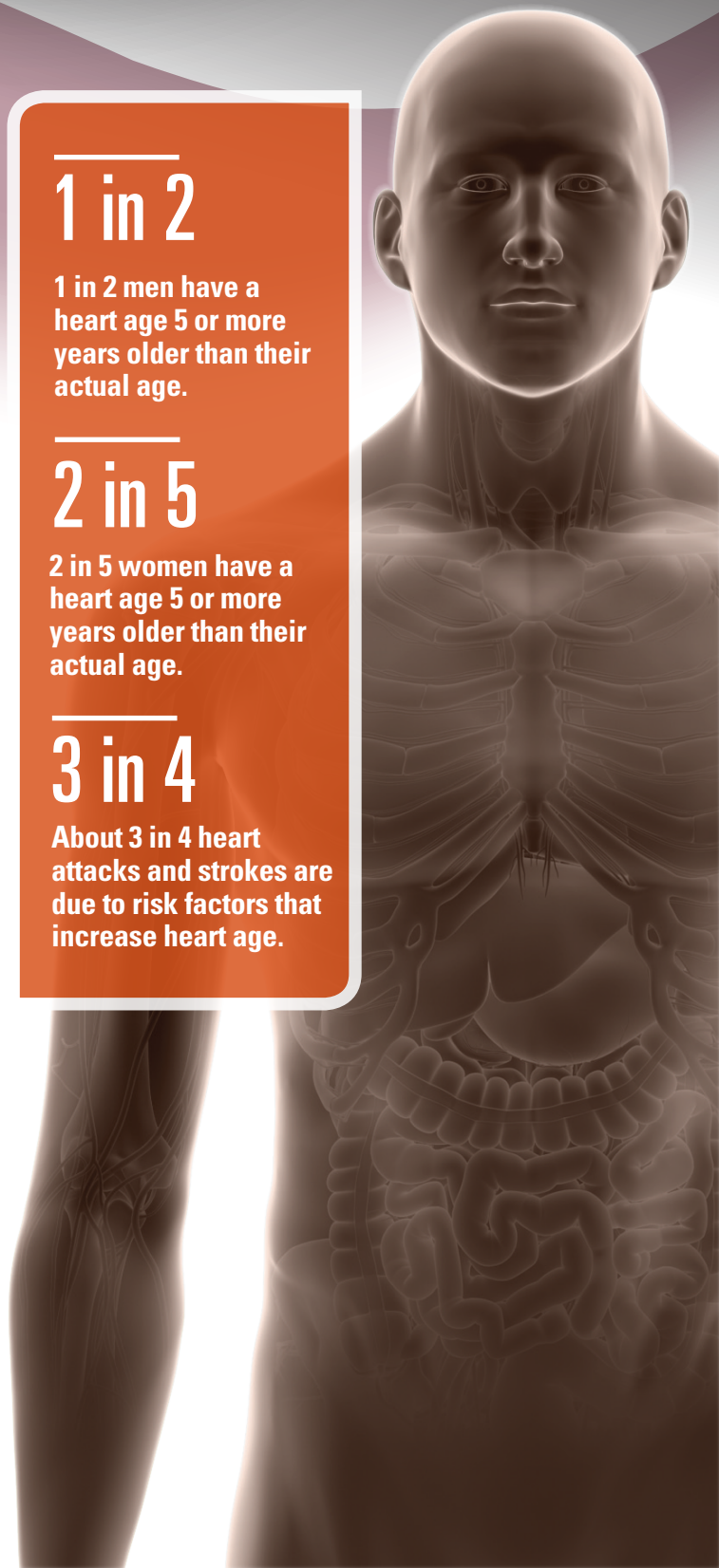
Is Your Heart Older Than You?

Her age is 53. But her heart is 75 years old because she smokes and has uncontrolled high blood pressure. She's not alone because most American adults have a heart that is older than their actual age. One way to understand your risk for a heart attack or stroke is to learn your "heart age." Heart age is the age of your heart and blood vessels as a result of your risk factors for heart attack and stroke. There are some things that put you at risk for a heart attack or stroke that you cannot change such as getting older or your family history; yet there are many others that you can change. If you smoke or have high blood pressure, your heart age will be much higher than your actual age. The most common reasons for a higher heart age that can be changed or managed are: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, obesity, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and diabetes. At any age, you can make your heart younger by making changes that reduce your risk. Even if you haven't had a heart attack or stroke, most US adults have a heart age older than their actual age placing them at greater risk of having one.

What you can do:

- Learn your heart age and how to improve it. www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/heartage.htm
- Start by choosing a risk factor or two that you're ready to change, like smoking or high blood pressure, and focus on improving them first.
- Work with your doctor to make heart healthy choices for a lower heart age.
- Take action at any age to lower your heart age and keep it low over time.

Want to learn more? www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/heartage



1 in 2

1 in 2 men have a heart age 5 or more years older than their actual age.

2 in 5

2 in 5 women have a heart age 5 or more years older than their actual age.

3 in 4

About 3 in 4 heart attacks and strokes are due to risk factors that increase heart age.

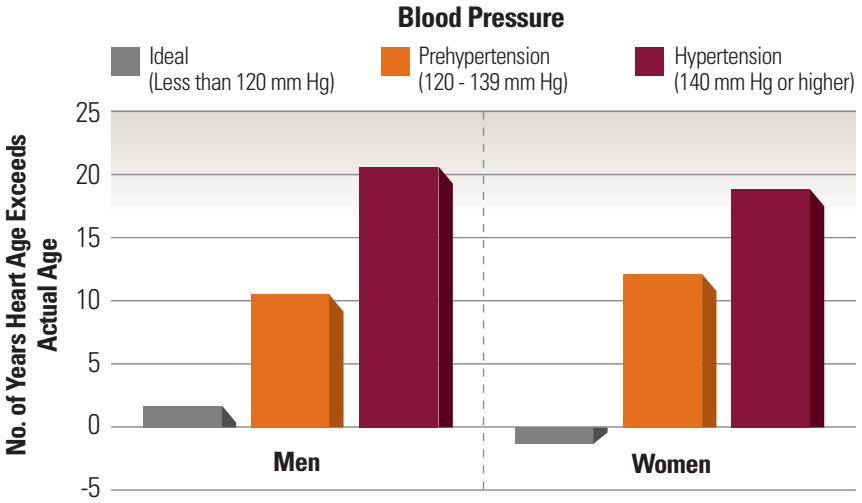
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Problem:

US adults have hearts 7 years older than they should be.

Though there are other ways of looking at your risk for having a heart attack or stroke, heart age is an easy way for us to talk about it. You want a heart age that is the same or younger than your actual age. Using information from the Framingham Heart Study and data collected from every US state, CDC projections show that around 69 million US adults that haven't had a heart attack or stroke, have a heart age that is 5 or more years older than their actual age. That's about the number of people living in the 130 largest US cities combined. One in 2 men and 2 in 5 women have heart ages 5 or more years older than their actual age, with the average being 7 years older.

Having an ideal blood pressure (less than 120/80) lowers your heart age.



Sources: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011 and 2013. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2007–2012.

For most US adults ages 30-74, their heart age is much older than their actual age, especially for men (average of 8 years older, compared to an average of 5 years among women) and African Americans (average of 11 years older for both men and women). These groups also are more likely to have risk factors that increase heart age.*

	AFRICAN AMERICAN		HISPANIC		NON-HISPANIC WHITE	
RISK FACTOR	**MEN**	**WOMEN**	**MEN**	**WOMEN**	**MEN**	**WOMEN**
Are current smokers	26%	18%	18%	10%	21%	20%
Have high blood pressure	42%	44%	31%	29%	32%	25%
Have diabetes	13%	15%	13%	13%	8%	7%
Are overweight or obese	78%	79%	80%	70%	76%	56%

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011 and 2013.

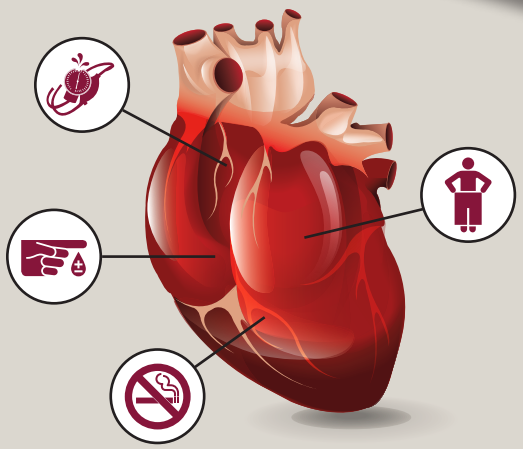
* Percent of adults with risk factors included in the Framingham Heart Age calculator that increase their heart age.

Examples of actual age vs. heart age

Many people have a heart age that is greater than their actual age because of certain reasons.

Actual Age	Reasons	Heart Age
45 year old male	• Smoker • High blood pressure (systolic blood pressure of 150 mm Hg) • Diabetic • Healthy weight (body mass index (BMI) of 23)	75 years
50 year old female	• Non-Smoker • High blood pressure (systolic blood pressure of 148 mm Hg) • Diabetic • Obese (BMI of 32)	85 years

Source: Framingham Heart Age Calculator, www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/heartage.htm



Prescription for a younger heart

High blood pressure – Make control your goal.

High cholesterol – Work with your doctor on a treatment plan to manage your cholesterol.

Diabetes – Work with your doctor on a treatment plan to manage your diabetes.

Tobacco use – If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, get help to quit. Avoid secondhand smoke.

Unhealthy diet – Eat a healthy diet, low in sodium and trans fats and high in fresh fruits and vegetables.

Physical inactivity – Get 150 minutes every week of a moderate intensity exercise such as brisk walking.

Obese – Maintain a healthy weight.

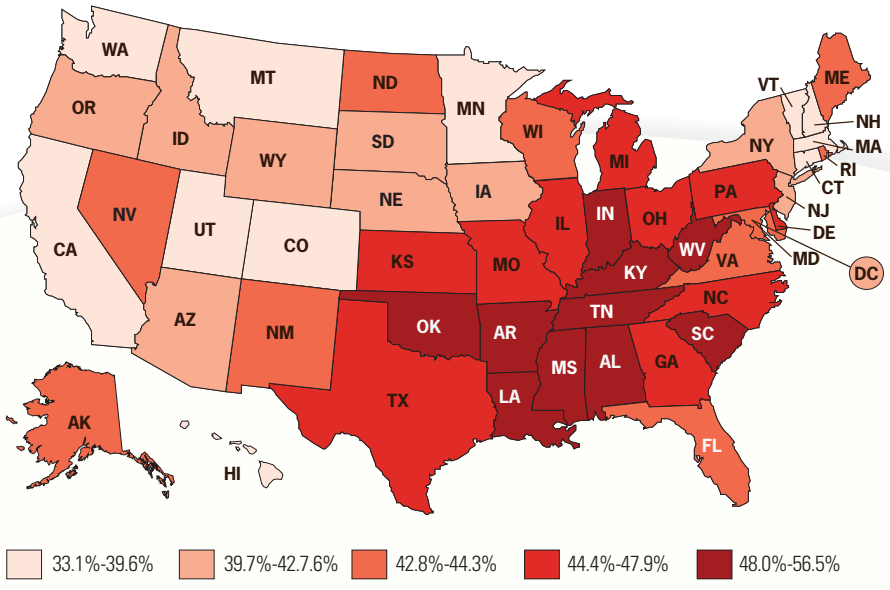
Source: Vital Signs, September 2013

There are geographic differences in average heart age across states.

Mississippi, West Virginia, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Alabama are the five states that have the highest percentage of adults with heart ages 5 or more years older than their actual age, while the five states with the lowest are Utah, Colorado, California, Massachusetts, and Hawaii.

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011 and 2013. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2007–2012.

Percentage of adults whose heart age is 5 or more years older than their actual age*



*Adults aged 30-74 with no history of heart attack or stroke.

What Can Be Done?

The Federal government is:

- Requiring most health plans to cover recommended preventive services at no out-of-pocket cost (such as co-pays or deductibles) through the Affordable Care Act, for example, blood pressure screening and tobacco cessation interventions and counseling to prevent heart disease and stroke.
  www.healthcare.gov/preventive-care-benefits/
- Leading the national Million Hearts® initiative to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes by 2017.
  Millionhearts.hhs.gov
- Providing resources to all 50 states to address chronic disease prevention, including heart disease and stroke, including through the Prevention and Public Health Fund.
- Leading national campaigns that address causes of heart disease and stroke, such as Let's Move! www.letsmove.gov, and Tips from Former Smokers www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/.

States can:

- Promote safe walking areas and access to healthy food in communities.
- Address tobacco use comprehensively by promoting smoking quitlines and tobacco-free areas, increasing the price of tobacco products, and running hard-hitting anti-tobacco ads.
- Partner with hospitals to identify and address the health care issues in their community.
- Prevent heart disease and stroke by using easily understood communication materials to promote how to lower heart age and reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers can:

- Calculate heart age among your patients aged 30–74 and talk with them about the effect of risk factors on their heart health.
- Help patients choose a risk factor or two to focus on improving first, such as quitting smoking, getting regular exercise, making healthy eating a part of their lives, and helping them take their medications as prescribed.
- Refer patients to community resources such as smoking quitlines and diabetes prevention programs that will support them as they make and keep these lifestyle changes.
- Continue to use other calculators recommended by national guidelines that assess cardiovascular risk and help inform treatment decisions.

Everyone can:

- Learn your heart age and how to improve it.
  www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/heartage.htm
- Start by choosing a risk factor or two that you're ready to change, like smoking or high blood pressure, and focus on improving them first.
- Work with your doctor to make heart healthy choices for a lower heart age.
- Take action at any age to lower your heart age and keep it low over time.

For more information, please contact
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