



# HEALTH

Survey reveals tragic impact on community

## Over half of UAE residents affected by heart disease

More than half of UAE residents have been affected by heart disease during their lifetime, according to a new study commissioned by Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, an integral part of Mubadala Health, to mark World Heart Day on September 29.

The survey of more than a thousand UAE residents revealed that 55 percent of respondents had been directly affected by heart disease, either through being diagnosed themselves (12%), having a close friend or family member diagnosed with heart disease (53%), or both. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the UAE, with symptoms in patients often occurring a decade earlier than their counterparts in other developed nations.

"These results make clear the tragic impact that heart disease has on our community. Each and every heart disease diagnosis ripples out from the patient to their family and friends, naturally causing a great deal of anguish for all concerned. It doesn't have to be this way; most heart disease cases could be prevented and that is really the driving force behind our campaign for healthier hearts, together," says Dr. Ronney Shantouf, a cardiologist at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi.

Positive findings in the survey were a strong awareness of the risk factors for heart disease with 78 percent of respondents saying they understood the risk factors and 77 percent reporting they knew heart disease was preventable. In addition, more than half of those surveyed were aware that physicians recommend more than 150 minutes of exercise a week to help prevent heart disease.

Despite this high level of awareness, 53 percent of UAE residents reported they have not had their heart health checked for more than two years, with almost one third (30 percent) saying they had never done so. Even among residents over the age of 45, the highest risk group surveyed, 49 percent had not had a heart health checkup for more than two years, with 22 percent still never having had one. Women were much less likely to have seen a doctor about their heart health, with 35 percent never having done so and 26 percent not having a checkup for more than two years.

"It is very concerning that despite the tremendous strain heart disease places on our community and the high level of awareness we see, people are still reluctant to visit the doctor and take steps to prevent heart disease. It is vitally

important that people visit a doctor, particularly if they are at higher risk. A proper cardiac evaluation along with some simple, heart healthy lifestyle changes could not only prevent a great deal of pain and anguish for yourselves, but your friends and family," concludes Dr. Shantouf.

While the majority of respondents have not had a heart health checkup in recent years, just 15 percent reported they did not have any risk factors for heart disease. The most common risk factors reported by those surveyed were high blood pressure (46%), stress (45%), cholesterol (44%) and lack of exercise (44%). In addition, obesity and diabetes, conditions closely linked to severe heart disease, were reported to affect 35 percent and 30 percent of those surveyed respectively.

Residents can find a range of practical information about cardiovascular disease, risk factors, treatment options and tips to lead a healthy lifestyle at <https://hearthealth.clevelandclinicabudhabi.ae>.

For more information or to request an appointment at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, call 800 8 CCAD (2223), visit [www.clevelandclinicabudhabi.ae](http://www.clevelandclinicabudhabi.ae) or download the Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi app.



Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi specialized team on standby and ready to provide emergency care. Inset: Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi ambulance

Every minute counts

## Heart attack treatment guideline beaten by 40 minutes

Doctors at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, a designated chest pain center and integral part of Mubadala Health, are using World Heart Day on September 29 to urge residents to take any sign of chest pain seriously and seek proper medical care.

Designated as a chest pain center by the Department of Health Abu Dhabi, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi has a specialized team on standby and ready to provide emergency care for heart attack patients 24 hours a day. This level of preparedness means that the hospital's door to balloon time, or the amount of time that passes between a heart attack patient arriving at the hospital and the team removing the blockage and restoring blood flow to the heart, took an average of 53 minutes in 2020, almost 40 minutes faster than the American College of Cardiology target of 90 minutes.

"When it comes to heart attacks, for every minute that goes by without medical treatment, the chances of a good outcome for the patient decrease. An hour's delay is associated with an 8% increase in mortality. My message to the community is take chest pain seriously -- don't wait to see if it passes but get to a designated chest pain center as quickly as possible," says Dr. Mahmoud Traina, an interventional cardiologist at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi.

The hospital's heart attack response was tested recently when two severe heart attack patients arrived at the hospital within one minute of each other. Having received prior warning of the patients' arrival, the hospital's on-call team were able to respond and deliver lifesaving care despite the increased complexity presented by having two emergency cases at the same time. Caregivers from a range of disciplines came together to treat both patients simultaneously, achieving door to balloon times of 61 and 46 minutes, significantly faster than international standards.

"Research conducted at Cleveland Clinic shows that fast and effective care based on proven best practices can reduce in-hospital mortality. I am heartened to see what my colleagues in Abu Dhabi have achieved for their community. We share our findings and best practices. By working as one Cleveland Clinic, we are making great progress in making healthier hearts, together, everywhere," says Lars Svensson, MD, PhD, Chairman of the Sydell and Arnold Miller Family Heart, Vascular & Thoracic Institute at Cleveland Clinic.

Recent data suggests that only 15% of severe heart attack cases arrive at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi in an ambulance, significantly below the percentage in the United States. In Abu Dhabi, the vast majority of patients arrive at the emergency department after being driven by a friend or family member.

"Not all emergency departments have the same ability to provide rapid, high quality care in heart attack cases, particularly at night or over the weekend. This means that patients who don't go to a designated chest pain center directly can experience unnecessary delays in their treatment. Calling an ambulance means paramedics can begin diagnostics and call ahead to let us know a heart attack case is coming. That means we're ready to begin treatment as soon as they arrive, saving precious minutes for treatment," concludes Dr. Traina.

Residents can find a range of practical information about cardiovascular

## Normal cholesterol levels dangerously miscalculated

More than 70 percent of patients who suffer from heart disease or have risk factors do not maintain the appropriate cholesterol levels to prevent a severe cardiac event, according to experts at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, an integral part of Mubadala Health.

Excessive LDL or 'bad' cholesterol in the body can build up as plaque in the walls of the arteries, causing them to narrow and blocking blood flow to the heart, leading to a cardiac event if left untreated. While an LDL cholesterol range of 100 to 129 mg/dL is acceptable for people with no health issues, this level is considered high for patients suffering from heart disease or those with risk factors. A retrospective review of over 30 thousand patients with heart disease or risk factors at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi and Imperial College London Diabetes Centre (ICLDC) – a Mubadala Health partner – found that the average LDL cholesterol was an alarming 140 mg/dL. This is three times higher than the acceptable level to prevent a heart attack in such patients. About two-thirds of all patients with a major heart attack seen at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi in the last three years had abnormal cholesterol levels.

"A patient with heart disease or those who have risk factors, such as diabetes, obesity and smoking, must aim to maintain LDL cholesterol levels below 70 mg/dL. Every point of increased LDL cholesterol increases their risk of heart attack by

25 percent. The high bad cholesterol levels that we see in the UAE are shocking and need to be urgently addressed. We strongly urge people to have a regular heart health screening so that they can monitor these essential numbers, and avoid the loss of life and productivity especially among the younger population," says Dr. Hani Sabbour, Consultant Cardiologist in the Heart and Vascular Institute at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi.

Dr. Sabbour says that the barriers to understanding cholesterol numbers and their role in cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk reduction are many and require a multi-layered intervention approach from physicians and patients.

"There is an inertia towards medical therapy, especially in this age of 'Dr. Google' where patients self-diagnose and decide that they know best how to treat their health issues. They fall victim to misinformation about life-saving cholesterol drugs and refuse to follow prescribed treatment plans because of perceived side effects. We also see young high-risk patients who are not convinced that they can have a heart attack because no one wants to think 10 years into the future right now."

At the same time, he says, many general practitioners hesitate to offer aggressive treatments even to high-risk patients because of insufficient knowledge of the guideline recommendations or believing that lifestyle changes alone can help

lower LDL cholesterol levels.

"The desirable LDL cholesterol range isn't the same for a healthy person and for those suffering from risk factors. This can be misleading because patients may believe that they are within their target levels when in fact are still at very high risk. Another thing to understand is that cholesterol-rich foods do not impact the cholesterol levels present in your blood, genetics does. So, lifestyle changes alone cannot fix this," he explains.

Another major risk factor that is causing a rise in CVD in the UAE population is diabetes. According to the International Diabetes Federation, there are more than 1 million people living with diabetes in the UAE and another 1.2 million with pre-diabetes.

Dr. Sabbour, who is also a consultant cardiologist at ICLDC, says people with diabetes are two to four times more likely than others to develop cardiovascular disease.

"Insulin resistance causes an abnormal cholesterol profile, lowers HDL or 'good' cholesterol and increases LDL cholesterol and triglycerides – the waxy fats that give your body energy – which raise the risk of a heart attack. This is true even if a patient with diabetes has well-controlled blood sugar levels. That is why it is important that they also monitor their cholesterol and keep it within a healthy range, usually with a combination of good lifestyle habits, drugs and statins," he says.

disease, risk factors, treatment options and tips to lead a healthy lifestyle at [hearthealth.clevelandclinicabudhabi.ae](https://hearthealth.clevelandclinicabudhabi.ae).

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The most common symptoms of a heart attack include:

- Sudden, increasing chest pain and angina.\*
- Pain spreading from the jaw, throat, arm, back or upper stomach.
- Profuse sweating or cold sweats.

- Nausea/vomiting.
- Dizziness.
- Shortness of breath.
- Feelings of indigestion/heartburn.
- Rapid or irregular heartbeats.
- Extreme fatigue/weakness.
- Heavy, "elephant-sitting-on-your-chest" feeling.

\*Heart attack symptoms can vary by gender with many women not experiencing chest pain at all – only neck, jaw or back pain, among other symptoms.

editor's choice

