

## Complications of Heart Disease (An excerpt from the Mayo Clinic<sup>1</sup>)

One of the most common complications of heart disease is heart failure.

- **Heart failure.** Heart failure occurs when your heart can't pump enough blood to meet your body's needs. Over time, the heart can no longer keep up with the normal demands placed on it. The ventricles may become stiff and don't fill properly between beats. Also, the heart muscle may weaken, and the ventricles stretch (dilate) to the point that the heart can't pump blood efficiently throughout your body. Heart failure can result from many forms of heart disease, including heart defects, cardiovascular disease, valvular heart disease, heart infections, or cardiomyopathy.



Other complications of heart disease include:

- **Heart attack.** Coronary artery disease can cause a heart attack. Heart attacks usually occur when a blood clot blocks the flow of blood through a coronary artery – a blood vessel that feeds blood to a part of the heart muscle. Interrupted blood flow to your heart can damage or destroy a part of the heart muscle.
- **Stroke.** Cardiovascular disease may cause an ischemic stroke, which happens when the arteries

to your brain are narrowed or blocked and too little blood reaches your brain. A stroke is a medical emergency – brain tissue begins to die within just a few minutes of a stroke.

- **Aneurysm.** Cardiovascular disease can also cause aneurysms, a serious complication that can occur anywhere in your body. An aneurysm is a bulge in the wall of your artery. If an aneurysm bursts, you may face life-threatening internal bleeding. Although this is usually a sudden, catastrophic event, a slow leak is possible. If a blood clot within an aneurysm dislodges, it may block an artery at another point.
- **Peripheral artery disease.** The same atherosclerosis that can lead to coronary artery disease can also lead to peripheral artery disease. When you develop peripheral artery disease (PAD), your extremities – usually your legs – don't receive enough blood flow to keep up with demand. This causes symptoms, most notably leg pain when walking (claudication).
- **Sudden cardiac arrest.** Sudden cardiac arrest is the sudden, unexpected loss of heart function, breathing, and consciousness. Sudden cardiac arrest usually results from an electrical disturbance in your heart that disrupts its pumping action and causes blood to stop flowing to the rest of your body. Sudden cardiac arrest almost always occurs in the context of other underlying heart problems, particularly coronary artery disease. Sudden cardiac arrest is a medical emergency. If not treated immediately, it is fatal, resulting in sudden cardiac death.

### Source:

1. Mayo Clinic (2009). Heart disease [online]. Retrieved December 18, 2009. From <http://mayoclinic.com/health/heart-disease/DS01120>.