

Chronic disease

Chronic disease is an illness that lasts for a long period of time. It is often preventable by lifestyle choices.

Definitions:

Chronic: long lasting or relapsing

Disease: an impairment of health or a condition of abnormal function

Risk Factors: a trait, behavior or condition that influences one's risk or may put one in danger.

Common Risk Factors:

*Unchangeable risk factors include sex, age, and genetic make-up.

*Changeable risk factors include unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, inadequate eating habits and lack of physical activity. They can also include common biological factors such as hypertension (high blood pressure), being overweight, hyperlipidemia (too much fatty substances in blood) and glucose intolerance.

*Societal, economic, and physical conditions can influence and shape people's behavior and indirectly affect other biological factors.

The main chronic disease risk factors that can impact YOUR health are:

- Tobacco use
- Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Stress management and mental health

The main chronic disease risk factors that can impact YOUR COMMUNITIES's health are:

- Social and Economic Conditions, such as poverty, employment, family size
- Environment, such as climate and air pollution;

-Culture, such as practices, norms and values;

-Urbanization or the built Environment, which influences housing, access to products and services.

Examples of risk factors that cause chronic disease

Example 1: Elle is 15. She is from a low-income family and she is overweight. Although the doctor recommended that Elle add fresh vegetables and fruits to her diet, she only eats processed or frozen food every day, because she cannot afford to buy fresh vegetables and fruits.

In this example, Elle's economic condition directly impacts Elle's eating habits, and indirectly impacts Elle's weight.

Example 2: Jack is a 17-year-old who has been diagnosed with major depression. Jack used to be an active and lively kid, but two years ago, his best friend died. Jack's behavior started to change -he rarely went outside his room and did not seem to be interested in anything, including meeting friends. During the assessment with the doctor, Jack said that when his best friend died, he was not able to share his feelings with anyone, because in his culture, it is believed that one should never show weaknesses to others. Jack said when he could not act "okay" anymore, he started to withdraw from people. In this example, Jack's health was directly affected by stress of losing a friend, and indirectly affected by Jack's culture.

Example 3: Eugene is 2 year old boy who has been diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which is a lung disease usually caused by smoking. Although Eugene has never smoked in his life, he's been exposed to second hand smoke since he was a baby because both of his parents smoke. In this example, Eugene's health has been directly affected by second hand smoke and indirectly affected by the environment.

How to decrease the chance of developing chronic diseases:

Many of the most common chronic diseases are linked by the *changeable* behavioural risk factors, such as smoking, consuming alcohol, poor diet, and physical inactivity, and by common and preventable biological factors such as hypertension, being overweight, hyperlipidemia (too much fatty substances in blood), and glucose intolerance (a form of prediabetes). Controlling the key risk factors mentioned above can have a major impact in reducing the chances of developing chronic disease.