

Healthy Connections

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Ten Ways to Prevent Heart Disease

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The pace of our lives in the 21st century is getting faster and faster. Consequently it seems to be harder to find the time to exercise or to cook well-balanced, healthy meals. We rev our engines with stimulants like caffeine and nicotine but then need depressants like alcohol to slow us down again.

Instead of sitting down to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, we stuff ourselves on the go with junk foods that are low in fiber and beneficial polyunsaturated fat but chock full of refined carbohydrates and saturated fat.

We may be living longer on average than our ancestors, but many of us spend our older years in chronic, poor health, taking multiple medications to lower blood pressure and cholesterol and keep our blood from clotting. Years of research have been unable to completely explain the cause of heart disease, also called atherosclerosis or

"hardening of the arteries." However, multiple "risk factors" have been identified. The more risk factors a person has, the greater the likelihood they will develop heart disease.

Known risk factors include: high cholesterol, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus, elevated homocysteine, cigarette smoking, chronic emotional stress ("Type A personality"), sedentary lifestyle and a family history of heart disease (genetics). Fortunately, all of these risk factors can be modified and possibly eliminated.

How do these risk factors lead to heart disease? Most of them appear to work through a final common pathway—the release of toxic substances that irritate the lining of the arteries. This irritation leads to a build up of inflamed clumps of cholesterol and calcium—called plaque—in the arterial walls. When the plaque gets thick, it causes a partial obstruction, slowing the blood supply to tissues and organs

downstream. If the blood supply is completely shut off, the result can be a heart attack or stroke.

The ten daily recommendations consist of different ways to (1) insure a good oxygen supply to the tissues, (2) lower cholesterol, (3) eliminate the toxins that irritate the arterial walls and (4) keep the blood naturally thin and less likely to clot.

Even a brief amount of **exercise** every day helps keep your metabolism functioning optimally. This allows you to keep your weight down by burning calories more. It also lowers cholesterol, stabilizes blood sugar, lowering blood pressure, and strengthens heart muscle. And, it is a terrific way to alleviate stress.

The saturated fats in greasy and fried foods can increase artery-clogging cholesterol in the bloodstream. Refined carbohydrates raise blood sugar, which stimulates the

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production of insulin. High insulin levels leads to weight gain and elevates the harmful blood fats called triglycerides.

In contrast, **dietary fiber** can bind up fat and cholesterol, allowing them to be eliminated it in the stool. Medical studies have shown that garlic and fish oil can lower triglycerides, thin the blood (to avoid clots), and lower blood pressure. The combination works better than taking either one alone.

Taking moderately high doses of **B vitamins such as B6, B12 and folic acid** can lower blood levels of homocysteine, a substance which researchers now believe is as harmful—if not more so—than cholesterol.

Fruits and vegetables are rich in colorful pigments called flavonoids and carotenoids. These pigments act as antioxidants that protect heart muscle by absorbing free radicals. **Vitamin E and Coenzyme Q10** are particularly potent anti-oxidants, both of which have been shown in medical studies to be beneficial to the heart.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, heart disease is the leading killer of adults in

the US, accounting for 1/3 of all deaths. Fortunately, most of the causes of heart disease are preventable. (www.cdc.gov)

By making some simple changes in your diet, taking a few nutritional supplements, exercising regularly and engaging in nurturing social activities, you can maximize your chances at living a long and healthy life.

To keep your heart and blood vessels healthy, try the following 10 things EVERY DAY:

(1) Get some exercise—enough to breathe deeply for 20 minutes: for example, skip the elevator and climb the stairs; take a walk during lunch; ride your bike to work.

(2) Replace greasy, fried foods and refined carbohydrates (sugar and flour) with a couple of servings of colorful fresh fruits and vegetables.

(3) Add a tablespoon of fiber from oat bran, psyllium seed husks or freshly ground flax seeds.

(4) Add a freshly minced garlic clove to your dinner, OR take two garlic tablets containing a total of 6000 mcg

of allicin.

(5) Eat a serving of deep sea/cold water fish, such as salmon, mackerel, tuna or sardines, OR take a supplement of fish oil providing 1000 mg EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and 500 mg DHA (docosahexaenoic acid).

(6) Drink a glass or two of fresh citrus juice OR take a supplement of 1000 mg Vitamin C and 1000 mg citrus bioflavonoids.

(7) Drink a small glass of red wine, a large glass of unsweetened purple grape juice, OR a supplement of 100 mg pinebark (Pynogenol™) or grapeseed (proanthocyanidin) extract.

(8) Take 400 IU of natural Vitamin E (d-alpha tocopherol) with 50mg Coenzyme Q10 (ubiquinone).

(9) Take a supplement of vitamin B complex containing at least 800 mcg folic acid, 25 mg B6 and 50 mcg B12.

(10) Share your feelings: take some quality time to connect with a friend or loved one.

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