

STAYWELL



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Having a Healthy Heart

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States with almost 700,000 people dying of this disease each year. That is about 29 percent of all U.S. deaths. Many times no obvious heart symptoms are noticed until a life-threatening condition presents itself.



Since many people feel fine and do not take advantage of health screens or yearly physicals, they assume what they don't know won't hurt them. This may be one of the reasons why heart disease is referred to as the silent killer. Knowing the risks of heart disease and working to decrease them is important for improving quality of life.

Keeping a Heart Healthy



Risk factors are variables that can increase the probability of heart disease or stroke. Although some risk factors are uncontrollable, some factors can be controlled or improved with lifestyle changes. The following are controllable risk factors:

Smoking – The odds of having a heart attack or heart disease for someone who smokes (or is exposed to second-hand smoke), is **two** to **four** times greater than with any other risk factor.

Diabetes – Diabetes increases the risk of heart disease. Approximately 75 percent of those with diabetes die of some form of heart or vessel disease. The peaks and falls in blood sugar levels damage cells and can lead to heart disease.

Cholesterol – The lipid profile is a group of tests that are often ordered together to determine risk of coronary heart disease. These tests have

proven to be good indicators of whether someone is likely to have a heart attack or stroke caused by blockage of blood vessels or hardening of the arteries. Depending on the results and other risk factors, treatment options may involve life-style changes such as diet and exercise, or lipid-lowering medication.

Blood Pressure – High blood pressure indicates a possible buildup in arteries and blood vessels. Over time, slightly elevated blood pressure causes long-term damage.

Diet and Nutrition – The type of food and serving size can affect the body systems and general health. Foods high in fat and cholesterol can cause heart damage.

Physical Activity – While lack of exercise is bad for the whole body (and the mind), it is particularly bad for the heart. If you're sedentary, you're almost twice as likely to suffer a heart attack as someone who exercises regularly.

Weight Management – Obesity is often the blame for heart disease; however, heart disease does not discriminate. Many people who suffer from heart problems are not overweight. Weight should be managed with diet and physical activity, both of which lower the risk of heart disease to a greater extent than weight loss alone.

Time – Poor time management increases stress. Stress is a direct risk for heart disease.

Stress – The more stress you have in your life, the greater the risk of illness. Up to 80 percent of visits to a primary care physician are stress related. People are treated for symptoms of a disease or illness when in reality, chronic stress leads to a breakdown of body systems and increased illness, especially chronic conditions and many incurable syndromes when left untreated.

Reducing the Risks

Be Aware – Get your annual physical or health screens! Don't procrastinate! Some people kid themselves into thinking that if they don't have a regular physical exam or health screen, they won't get sick. However, if there is a problem and it's not diagnosed and treated early, the final outcome can be (and usually is), life-threatening. Don't keep your head buried in the sand!



Age Appropriate Health Screens – Talk to your doctor and receive the proper screens and health tests for your age.

Be Active – Health statistics show that one-third of Americans are overweight and another third are obese. Obesity is a risk factor for a lengthy list of other diseases including hypertension, stroke, and heart disease. Scientific evidence shows that obesity does have a genetic component, but lifestyle factors are probably more important. So if that is true, then obesity should be reversible.

Whether you are overweight or not, the standard recommendation is “diet and exercise.” If you participate in 30 minutes of physical activity four or more days per week, your risk of developing heart disease will be 50 percent less than someone who is inactive.



Check Blood Pressure – People often say their blood pressure is only high when it is checked by a doctor. If this is true, it should be a concern

because this indicates that blood pressure rises when a person is feeling nervous or uncomfortable. When blood pressure is continually high, the risk of developing heart disease increases.



Eat Healthy – Many people get caught up in specific diets and weight-loss plans. A recent study showed only one particular lifestyle pattern is related to the longevity of life – eating less.

People who eat less tend to live longer. This relates not only to quantity but also caloric intake. A person can eat high calorie foods in small amounts and still consume too many calories. The key is to limit serving size along with caloric intake.

Quit Smoking – Smoking accounts for about one in five deaths from cardiovascular disease. Women who smoke are two to six times more likely to suffer a heart attack than those who don't. The risk increases with the number of cigarettes smoked each day. If you quit, however, your risk for heart disease plummets 50 percent within one year. Joining a support group and/or participating in regular exercise can help make it easier to quit smoking.



Check Diabetes – Most individuals with diabetes do not test their blood sugar levels often enough, and they often guess when it comes to dosage. A diabetic person may not feel symptoms; therefore, it becomes easy to ignore the problem. Damage to the heart occurs and is often irreversible. Diabetes is controllable and there is information available to help. The following link is a PDF file. This website is an excellent tool to help a diabetic person monitor blood glucose levels.



- www.lifescan.com

Here are some other sites to help calculate your risk of heart disease.

- www.inspirahealth.com/apps/nahrs/index.htm?hostID=19
- www.mcmc.org/health_topics/health_test.htm
- www.americanheart.org

Sources:

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