

Family Health Care

Counselor

Preventing Heart Disease

Your heart is your ultimate life support system – beating 100,000 times a day, bringing what’s essential to every part of your body through a complex network of veins and arteries. But when things go wrong, it can lead to serious disorders. Taking good care of your heart can help keep the beat going strong over the course of a lifetime.



Heart Health

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What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease is a broad term used to describe a range of diseases that affect the heart. These include angina (chest pain), arrhythmia (irregular heart rhythm) and coronary artery disease resulting from hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis) or plaque buildup.

Fatty plaque deposits are a main contributor to heart disease. They begin in artery walls and thicken over time, slowly hardening the arteries and blocking blood flow. Worse, plaque can suddenly rupture, creating a blood clot that causes a heart attack or stroke. In fact, blocked arteries caused by plaque buildup and blood clots are the leading cause of death by heart attack.

Who is Most at Risk?

It's well known that smoking, being overweight and having high blood pressure puts you at a higher risk of having heart disease. A family history of heart disease also increases your risk of coronary artery disease – especially if a parent developed it before age 55.

Your emotional state can also be a factor. Depression, anger, anxiety, chronic stress and even loneliness can all promote heart disease. Research shows that atherosclerosis seems to advance faster in people who score high on anger or hostility scales. Anger can also trigger heart attacks. According to one study, one in every 40 heart attack survivors reported an “episode of anger” two hours prior to the attack.

Science is also finding that women are more susceptible to heart disease than once believed. Although men generally are at greater risk than women – especially during their 30s and 40s – the reality is that more women will die from heart disease than men. It's the leading health problem that kills women.

The main difference between genders is that women tend to develop heart disease later in life. The reason behind this is still not fully understood, one theory is that women are somewhat protected as long as they're still menstruating because of the effect of hormones. However, it is difficult to diagnose, since most women don't start to show symptoms until at least ten years later than men.

What should you do if you're concerned about your risk? Talk to your doctor. Bear in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to heart disease treatments. They may vary, depending on the severity of your disease state. You may need lifestyle changes, medications, surgery or other medical procedures as part of your treatment.

The most important thing to remember, is that your heart health depends on how well you take care of your overall health. Even small lifestyle changes can reduce your risk by 50 percent. A little awareness – plus committing to a better diet and exercise – can help you live a longer, healthier life.

The High – and Lowdown – on Blood Pressure

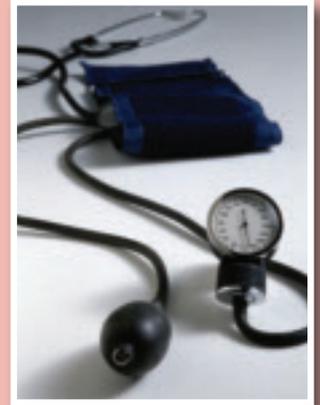
High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is the elevation of the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart pumps blood. If this pressure stays high over time, it can damage your body in two ways. First, it can cause narrowing of the arteries, also known as atherosclerosis. Second, it can force your heart to pump harder, one of the first steps leading to congestive heart failure.

How can you tell if you have high blood pressure? Unfortunately, you can't. High blood pressure has no symptoms, so you could feel quite well even though your numbers are elevated. By that time, the damage to your arteries could already be done. If you haven't had your blood pressure checked in two years, see a doctor. Blood pressure is considered high when it exceeds 140/90 mmHg.

Having high blood pressure doesn't automatically mean you will develop heart disease. A lot depends on what other risk factors are present. Excess weight, for instance, magnifies the harmful effects of high blood pressure.

So does smoking, stress, high salt consumption and lack of exercise.

Getting your blood pressure to a healthy level is one of the most important steps in protecting your heart. Depending on how elevated your numbers are, your doctor may prescribe medication. The good news is simple lifestyle changes can reduce blood pressure too. Taking potassium and magnesium supplements has also been shown to have a beneficial effect. Be sure to check with your FHCP pharmacist about possible interactions with any prescription medications you are taking.



The (Not All Bad) News on Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a soft, waxy substance that is essential for your health because it helps make cell walls and hormones. Yet it has a bad rap as a heart hazard – which is misleading. There are two kinds – the “good” cholesterol, high-density lipoprotein (HDL), and the “bad”, low-density lipoprotein (LDL).

The “bad” cholesterol fully deserves its bad rap, for it contributes to the dangerous fatty plaque buildup in your artery walls. The “good” cholesterol, on the other hand, can help sweep out the “bad” cholesterol from cells found in plaque. So you'll want more of the good kind circulating in your blood because a higher HDL can lower your risk of heart disease.

Your total cholesterol level is measured by milligrams per deciliter (mg/dl). Most people should aim for an LDL level below 130 mg/dl. However, if you have other risk factors for heart disease, your target LDL may be below 100 mg/dl.

If your cholesterol is too high, your doctor may prescribe a drug called a statin, which lowers levels of LDL. As well, switching to healthier food fare could help increase your “good” cholesterol to a small extent.

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Weight Matters

Being overweight tops the list of heart disease risks, because extra body fat contributes to both high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Fat cells also manufacture the inflammatory substances that create the fatty plaque deposits that lead to atherosclerosis. The heavier you are, the more harmful the effects.

Doctors evaluate your risk by your Body Mass Index (BMI). The higher your BMI, the higher your risk of heart disease. But where you're carrying your weight is critical as well.

Research shows that packing excess fat around your abdomen is associated with heart disease. That's because tummy fat is more chemically active than the fat on your thighs and buttocks. This is known as "visceral fat", which can lead to a condition called metabolic syndrome, a cluster of symptoms like high blood pressure, high cholesterol and insulin resistance.

The risk goes up with a waist size that is greater than 35 inches for women or greater than 40 inches for men. In fact, experts now recommend that you ask your doctor to check your waist circumference along with your weight and blood pressure. Remember – even a small weight loss can make a big difference to your heart health, so whittling down is worth it.



Getting a Move On

Along with being overweight, a sedentary (inactive) lifestyle can make you a prime candidate for heart disease. Research shows that inactive people are nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease than those who are more active. What's more, this holds true even if you have no other conditions or habits that increase your risk for heart disease.

Getting regular exercise not only reduces your risk of heart disease, but it can also decrease your chances of developing other risk factors. For example, it may lower your "bad" LDL cholesterol, raise your "good" HDL cholesterol, and help you lose weight. It can also strengthen your heart, improve your body's ability to use oxygen, and lower blood pressure. Last but not least, the 'feel-good' brain chemicals produced from exercising can help you better cope with stress.

Being fit doesn't mean running a marathon. Something as simple as a 30-minute walk three to four times a week is generally enough. That being said, there are certain precautions you should take if you have heart disease. Ask your doctor what your safe level of exercise is.

The Dangers of Prolonged Sitting

Sitting for hours on end isn't just bad for your back – it may even shorten your life. The latest research found that sitting can lead to obesity and heart disease. Women who sit for more than six hours a day have a roughly 40 percent higher risk of dying from any cause, versus those who sit for fewer than three hours – regardless of their fitness levels. Moreover, daily exercise isn't enough to offset the risk. The solution is to move around for at least ten minutes for every working hour. It could be as easy as standing up every time you take a phone call, or taking a walking break.

Smoking

Most people associate smoking with only lung cancer. But smoking is also a major cause of heart disease for both men and women. Almost 15% of deaths from heart disease and strokes in Canada are directly related to smoking.

A person's risk of heart disease and heart attack greatly increases with every cigarette smoked, you don't have to be a chain smoker to put yourself in danger. Any amount of smoking – even light or occasional smoking – damages the heart and blood vessels.

The nicotine present in smoke causes heart disease by:

- Decreasing oxygen to the heart
- Increasing blood pressure and heart rate
- Constricting your blood vessels, making them more susceptible to atherosclerosis
- Damaging the cells that line the blood vessels and coronary arteries

Moreover, this damage isn't limited to smokers. Secondhand smoke can also affect people who are frequently around smokers. In fact, secondhand smoke can damage the hearts and blood vessels of non-smokers in much the same way that active smoke harms people who do smoke.

One of the best ways to reduce your risk of heart disease is to avoid tobacco smoke. If you already smoke – butt out. Even if you have been smoking for a long time, quitting can lower your risk of developing heart disease. It can also reduce your risk of atherosclerosis and blood clots.

Understandably, quitting won't be easy. Your FHCP pharmacist can be a great resource in recommending smoking cessation products or supplements to help you break the habit.



Q & A

Ask Your Helpful FHCP Pharmacist

Q. I've heard that heart attack symptoms are different for women and men. Is that true?

A. Yes. The signs are much more subtle for women. Women may feel less severe pain – and not always in the region of the heart. Because their signs are much less obvious, women often wait longer to go to the ER than men do – which can be fatal. Heart attack warning signs women should watch out for include: extreme fatigue, pressure or achiness in the upper back, shoulders, neck or jaw, profuse sweating, nausea or dizziness, breathlessness, sleeplessness and anxiety.

Q. How does aspirin (ASA) benefit the heart?

A. Research shows that taking aspirin regularly can reduce the risk of heart attack in two ways. First, it fights the pain and inflammation associated with heart disease. Second, it inhibits a substance called prostaglandin, which causes blood platelets to clump together and form artery-clogging blood clots. Always check with your doctor about what the right dose is for you.

Q. I recently started taking a hypertensive drug, and find that my mouth is feeling quite dry and irritated. Is this normal?

A. Yes. Medications can cause a condition called Dry Mouth, which affects your salivary glands. The more medications you take, the greater your chance of getting it. Sipping water more frequently during the day and chewing sugar-free gum can help relieve the dryness. So can avoiding alcohol-based toothpastes or mouthwashes, which can be irritating to a sore and dry mouth. Your FHCP pharmacist can help you select products that are especially designed for Dry Mouth. As well, if symptoms are really bothering you, your pharmacist can recommend possible substitutions to your prescription.



A Healthy Position

Heart Disease Assessment Tool

ASSESSING YOUR RISK Answer Yes or No

For men: Are you over age 45?

For women: Are you post-menopausal or over age 55?

Does anyone in your immediate family have a history of heart disease or diabetes?

Are you of African or Latino descent?

Do you have diabetes?

Do you smoke?

Is your blood pressure 140/90 mmHg or higher?

Is your total cholesterol over 200?

Are you 30 pounds over your recommended weight?

For men: Is your waist measurement greater than 40 inches?

For women: Is your waist measurement greater than 35 inches?

Do you exercise less than three times a week?

SCORING

Add up your total of "Yes" and "No" answers. If you answered "Yes" two times or less, you're not at risk. However, if you answered "Yes" three or more times you could be at risk. For each risk factor you checked, your overall risk of developing heart disease goes up.

Obviously you can't control factors like age or ethnicity. However, there is much you can do to minimize the factors you can control. Remember – heart disease is easier to treat when it's detected early, so talk to your doctor about any concerns you have about your health.

Take The Check-Up Challenge

It can't be said enough – losing weight, exercising regularly and lowering your blood pressure lowers your risk of developing heart disease. Dealing with emotional issues helps too. If necessary, get professional guidance to help with stress management, relaxation and healthier habits.

Ask About Our Preferred® Private Label Products!

Next Month's Feature!

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Digestive Health

Your digestive system includes the esophagus, stomach, and small and large intestines. These interconnected organs work together to digest and absorb the food you eat and rid your body of waste. Problems can occur – especially if you're stressed out, eating poorly, or have intolerances to certain foods. Fortunately many over-the-counter medications found at your pharmacy can help ease the discomfort.

In Next Month's Feature Find Out More About:

- The anatomy of your gut
- Factors that affect your digestion
- Probiotics – the good and bad bacteria in your gut
- Intestinal ailments
- GERD – Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease
- Medication for digestive problems

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