

## **Heart Health; Protect Your Heart by Nancy Russell, M.D. February 2019**

Over eighty-one million Americans, that is about one in three people have cardiovascular disease. This includes heart disease and hardening of the arteries leading to heart attacks, strokes and loss of limb. Thirty-six percent of all deaths are due to cardiovascular disease and it is preventable in many cases.

There are several causes and many of these can be controlled or treated naturally. The first is poor diet and nutritional deficiencies. A diet low in fiber, high in sugar and refined grains and bad fats can harm the heart and blood vessels by causing inflammation which leads to hardening of the arteries and endothelial dysfunction.

Even though many people eat too much food, the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition points out that less than 5% of people in their research study consumed the government's Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA's) for key minerals essential to health. A lack of many different nutrients can harm the heart, particularly magnesium, vitamins A, C, D and the B vitamins, especially folate or folic acid. Vitamin D is a critical nutrient to lower the risk of heart disease as well as supporting your bones and immune system. Even if you've been diagnosed with heart disease or have had a heart attack or stroke, heart function can be improved with natural treatments with diet or supplementation. For patients with high blood pressure, other supplements may include Coenzyme Q10, potassium, and an ounce of dark chocolate per day. The amount of potassium in one banana, one cup of coconut water, or tomato or V-8 juice can normalize blood pressure.

One of the risk factors for cardiovascular disease is high blood pressure and needs to be treated. Sometimes you need blood pressure medications while you are working on natural ways to lower blood pressure. It has been shown by Italian researchers, 50% or overweight people with high blood pressure who lose weight can normalize blood pressure. Exercise is another tactic to lower blood pressure. Most people who are successful at exercising regularly are walkers, and a recent study showed that just a ten-minute walk can lower systolic blood pressure by 3 points. If you walk 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, you'll meet the official recommendations for the amount of physical activity you need to prevent high blood pressure and other health problems. If you are exercising regularly and eating healthfully and have lowered your stress response and your blood pressure is still elevated, ask your doctor to rule out sleep apnea. If your pulse or body temperature rises after eating, consider detecting food allergies and sensitivities and going on an elimination diet or other treatment. For men, another cause for elevated blood pressure may be testosterone deficiency and needs to be evaluated.

Lowering cholesterol get the most attention as *the* way to prevent cardiovascular disease. Moderately high cholesterol is not necessarily the most important or even an especially significant risk for cardiovascular disease, according to some authorities. Scientific research shows many other factors are more important in decreasing the risk of heart attack. They include exercising regularly, controlling high blood pressure, treating diabetes, eating healthfully, stopping smoking, receiving nutritional support from supplements and optimizing thyroid function. Getting cholesterol too low may be unhealthy, because cholesterol serves a critical function in the body. Cholesterol is essential for the manufacture of key hormones, such as cortisol, DHEA, estrogen, progesterone and testosterone. Yes, the cholesterol lowering medications so widely used today can save lives of those who have already had a heart attack or who have angina. But taken by those who have never had a heart attack may have only a little impact. If you want to lower cholesterol, there are safe, natural ways to do so without medication in many people. Nutritional treatments that can lower cholesterol are oatmeal, 3 cloves of garlic per day, and a handful of tree nuts such as almonds and macadamias. Niacin, vitamin B-3 can effectively lower cholesterol. The flush type niacin is much more effective than the non-flush. Doses of 500-1500mg per day can be safe but use with caution and under the care of a physician who can monitor blood sugar and liver functions. Other herbal treatments may include red yeast rice, berberine, artichoke, plant sterols, garlic and policosanol. To lower triglycerides, as high triglycerides can raise your risk of heart disease, avoid sugar, bad fats, and take 2000mg of omega-3 fish oil with at least 1000mg of DHA per day.

Another risk factor that can increase your risk of cardiovascular disease is lack of sleep. Research shows that sleeping less than 7 to 8 hours on a regular basis can double the risk of heart attack and stroke and this is accentuated if you have untreated sleep apnea. The last major risk factor for cardiovascular disease is happiness deficiency and stress, especially when underlying anger issues are present. It is imperative to deal with the stress in your life, have a regular, healthy way to blow off steam and search out a psychologist or counselor to discuss and sort out these issues. Take care and be gentle with yourself.