

Healthy Habits

February 2005

Tips for reaching and maintaining your optimum state of health

Heart Disease: Recognizing the Risk

February is American Heart Month so it seems like a good time to ask, "Am I, or is someone I love, at risk for a heart attack?" Statistically, the answer may be yes.

Serious Business

When you hear the term, "heart attack", you may remember comedian Redd Foxx clutching his chest and faking an attack whenever his son or neighbor challenged him. That may have made for funny television but it is no laughing matter for many people each day. The American Heart Association estimates that close to 700,000 Americans will have an initial heart attack this year and another 500,000 will suffer a recurrent attack. Almost half of all people who have a heart attack will die from it.

Who is at Risk?

Heart disease, is the number one killer of both men and women in the United States, yet it is still misdiagnosed or ignored in many women because symptoms may differ from the symptoms men experience. To place it in perspective, however, 42,000 women die from breast cancer every year. Heart disease and stroke combined kill more than ten times as many; 500,000 women, in that time.

Definition of a Killer

A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to the heart is stopped. Cells in the heart muscle that do not receive enough oxygen-carrying blood begin to die. The more time that passes without treatment to restore the blood flow, the greater the damage to the heart. Having high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol, smoking; and any previous heart damage, stroke or diabetes can significantly increase a person's chances of developing heart disease and having a heart attack. It is important to recognize the signs of a heart attack and to act immediately by calling 911. The chance of surviving a heart attack is increased if emergency treatment is administered as soon as possible.



Contact 1-800-SENTARA (1-800-736-8272) for information regarding Sentara's "Healthy Heart" & "Eating for Life" programs

Symptoms to act upon

For both men and women, heart attack symptoms may include the following:

Chest discomfort - most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts for more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back. The discomfort can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.

Discomfort in other areas of the upper body - this can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.

Shortness of breath - may accompany or precede chest discomfort.

Other symptoms - sudden dizziness, brief loss of consciousness, cold sweat, nausea, or a lightheaded feeling may occur.

Choose to Live

A healthy lifestyle *can* help you reduce your risk for heart attack.

Remember to make food choices that are low in fat and cholesterol and start or maintain an exercise routine. Also, avoid smoking, establish a relationship with your care provider, and **do not** ignore the warning signs.

Together, we just might just stop a killer.

The material contained in Healthy Habits is not intended to be medical advice on any particular matter. Readers should seek appropriate professional advice before acting on the basis of any information contained in this publication. This information is provided courtesy of Optima Health.