

Healthy Living

Fact Sheet



Heart Health

Dr John G. Clark, MD

What is heart disease?

Heart disease, as it's commonly called, is a condition in which the blood vessels of the heart become so deteriorated that they can no longer supply the muscles of the heart with enough oxygen-carrying blood and the heart muscle begins to die, giving the person chest pain (angina) or even a heart attack.

How do the blood vessels of the heart lose their ability to carry blood to the heart's muscles?

The blood vessels of the heart lose their ability to supply the heart muscles' need for oxygen when they become clogged with a diseased substance called plaque, or when they become thickened with inflammation, or both. Plaques are formed within blood vessel walls when inflammation increases and the blood contains excess cholesterol and/or oxidized dietary fats which all stick together as a lump inside the blood vessel thereby restricting the flow of blood.

Encouragement

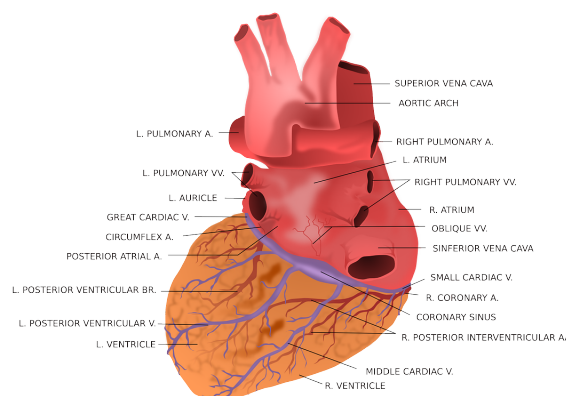
*"Delight yourself also
in the Lord, And He
shall give you the
desires of your heart."*

Psalms 37:4 NKJV

What causes inflammation and plaque in the heart?

Inflammation and plaque in the heart are caused by poor diet, poor water intake, and a lack of outdoor exercise. A diet that includes cholesterol or cooking oils, fried foods, dairy products, or meat increases the risk of heart disease. A diet deficient in foods that lower inflammation, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, increases the risk of heart disease. Psychological stress also greatly increases the risk of a heart attack.

HUMAN HEART: POSTERIOR VIEW



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Natural lifestyle approach

Dietary Considerations

A heart healthy diet is one that maximizes the intake of anti-inflammatory plant foods and minimizes processed foods and foods with cholesterol. Food that help reverse heart disease include dark green leafy vegetables, fresh fruits and vegetables, and naturally prepared nuts and seeds in moderation, free from added oil.

Exercise

The heart benefits greatly from an exercise program tailored to the person's physical fitness level. Of most benefit is exercise that increases the heart rate and efficiency such as brisk walking, running, swimming and biking.

Water

People who drink more water have fewer heart attacks. Three litres of water a day is recommended: one when arising in the morning, one mid-morning and one mid-afternoon.

Sunlight

Sunlight has been shown to help reduce plaque. Exercise outdoors is recommended for the full benefit of the sunshine and fresh air.



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Mind–Body Connection

Jenifer Skues
Health Psychologist

The Heart-Brain Connection

Did you know that scientific research has found that the nervous system carries messages between your heart and your brain? They communicate with each other, as well as with your body. In fact the heart talks more to the brain than the brain talks to the heart. The heart is actually a highly intelligent organ that has an electrical system controlling and regulating your heartbeat. Whether the rhythm of the heart is smooth and even or jagged and irregular, it determines how well your brain functions as well as your emotional state. Of course an even and smooth heart rate improves brain function with the ability to process information, resulting in emotional wellbeing and positive feelings. A jagged and irregular heart rate has the opposite effect by disrupting brain function as well as your ability to process information, resulting in emotional chaos and negative feelings.

Encouragement

*“Guard your heart
with all vigilance,
for from it are
the sources of life.”*

Proverbs 4:23 (NET)

Can you die from a broken heart?

More recent research has found that you can die from a broken heart. The good news is, however, that many sufferers recover from it, often within a week. The medical profession calls it the broken heart syndrome (stress-induced cardiomyopathy). It can be misdiagnosed as a heart attack and apparently it's hard to tell the difference. Fortunately unlike a heart attack there are no blocked arteries or permanent heart damage. However, the symptoms are like a heart attack as you get sudden, intense chest pain and shortness of breath due to a surge of stress hormones, usually caused by emotionally stressful event(s) such as intense grief, anger or surprise. This results in part of the heart temporarily enlarging and not pumping well, while the rest of your heart functions normally, although with more forceful contractions. Research has also found that women are more likely to experience the broken heart syndrome than men. It is evident that this heart disorder is related to the mind-body connection, as intense stress and emotions are linked to its onset.

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Heart Health Tool Kit

Healthy Heart Tips

If you want to have a healthy heart then managing your stress levels, establishing a healthy mind-body connection, and changing your beliefs and attitudes will keep your heart happy and well tuned.

1. Managing stress: Prevention is better than cure

Identify and monitor stress symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, sweaty palms, rapid shallow breathing, holding your breath, as well as an acid stomach. Then use your stress management tool kit to put the brake on your Autonomic Nervous System to slow down the adrenals, calm your heart, and focus your brain. Depending on time constraints you can start taking a few slow deep breaths, go for a walk, have a sunbath for at least 10 minutes, have a relaxing footbath with magnesium salts and lavender oil, use relaxation herbal tea (there's plenty to choose from), put lavender oil on your forehead and temples, play with your pet, use prayer and meditation etc. Work out some quick relaxation strategies and build them into your day.

2. Reconnecting the heart and the brain

Balancing the heart-brain connection rapidly reduces stress symptoms and keeps you focused in the present. Try this easy breathing technique I call heart-focused breathing. Put your hand on your heart and focus on taking slow and even breaths into the area where your hand is, then into the lungs (to the count of 5 in and 5 out). Also try to think of something you appreciate that generates a good heart feeling or connection.

3. Harnessing the power of your mind: Changing beliefs and thoughts

Every positive belief and related thoughts send positive messages to every cell of your body, and of course it's the opposite for negative beliefs and thoughts. You can literally change your mind by choosing to work on one irrational belief at a time that drives your distorted thinking. Renew your mind and you renew your heart.

Disclaimer: This fact sheet presents principles designed to promote good health and is not intended to take the place of personalised professional care. The opinions and ideas expressed are those of the writers. Readers are encouraged to draw their own conclusions about the information presented.