**Monitoring Your Heart Health**

*Tips to help avoid a cardiac event*

As an adult, it is not uncommon for things like doctor’s appointments and physical examinations to fall by the wayside. As you age, other responsibilities take over and seem to have greater importance, like your family or your career. These things are undeniably important, so you want to make sure that you can carry out these responsibilities to the best of your ability. Poor health, particularly heart health, will impact your ability to do your job and be there for those who need you most. Routine physical examinations can determine if there are any issues with your cardiovascular health, potentially preventing a serious cardiac event, such as a heart attack. At the very least, an exam may give you piece of mind. *It is a win-win situation.*

In addition to scheduling routine check-ups, there are a few other ways to ensure that you are putting your best foot forward when it comes to your heart health. Dr. Donald Ferrari, a Cardiologist at Paoli Hospital in Pennsylvania, suggests paying attention to your body during physical activity and recognizing that exercising is not a sole solution.

Any type of physical activity, whether it be a trip to the gym, playing with your kids in the yard, or participating in an adult sporting league can bring on a cardiac event. The older you get, the more at risk you are for cardiac problems, so it is important to pay attention to your body while working out and increasing your heart rate. If you are experiencing shortness of breath, chest pain, or dizziness, stop what you are doing immediately.

Exercise is great for your body and helps to prevent many health issues, however it is not nearly as effective by itself as it is in combination with a good diet and smart choices. Cardiologists recommend a low cholesterol diet. Low cholesterol and low blood pressure are crucial to maintaining good cardiovascular health.

It is also important to recognize that your health is impacted by your family history and choices. Being aware of a potential predisposition to heart disease is critical in taking care of yourself. More importantly, you should be cautious of the choices you are making, particularly if you are a smoker. Smoking will increase the risk of heart disease.

<http://www.dailylocal.com/lifestyle/20140902/medical-corner-monitoring-your-cardiovascular-health>

**Making Changes**

*Accepting the things you cannot change, courage to change the things you can…*

There are quite a few risk factors of cardiovascular disease. As with anything, there are some factors you can change and others you cannot. Age, ethnicity, family history, are aspects of yourself that you cannot prevent or change. Whether you like it or not, you often inherit the health issues of your family members. By the same token, you are going to age – whether you like it or not. Though you can dream of a magic fountain of youth, everyone ages, which inherently increases your risk of disease.

Since we cannot change these things about ourselves, let’s discuss the risk factors that we can change. Smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, unhealthy diet, hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes – all of these things can be treated or prevented. In fact, many of these factors can actually be linked to one another. Therefore, if you improve upon just a few of these, you have the potential to heighten your general health and overall well-being - not to mention, significantly increase your cardiovascular health.

Physical inactivity, as noted by the World Heart Federation, increases your risk of heart disease by 50%. Inactivity often leads to obesity which can then put you at risk for diabetes. Type 2 diabetes, in itself, is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Furthermore, the World Heart Federation says, “If you do not control diabetes then you are more likely to develop cardiovascular disease at an earlier age than other people and it will be more devastating.” With this in mind, exercise is crucial to maintaining good heart health. By simply adding exercise to your routine, you can decrease your risk for cardiac issues fairly quickly.

Hypertension, also referred to as high blood pressure, is another treatable risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Hypertension patients, as long as they do not go undiagnosed or untreated, should not be at major risk of heart disease. Along with high blood pressure, high cholesterol can contribute to heart problems. High cholesterol can be lowered by following a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and medication, if needed.

Smoking, and tobacco use in any form, will put you at a greater risk for heart disease than a non-smoker.

The risk is particularly high if you are a long-term or heavy user, or you are a woman. Quitting smoking, even minimal use, will immediately lower your risk.

With a handful of lifestyle changes, you can take lowering your risk of cardiovascular disease into your own hands.

<http://www.world-heart-federation.org/cardiovascular-health/cardiovascular-disease-risk-factors/>

**Smart Snacking**

*Healthy snack options for any craving*

Snacking is a weakness of many and the snacks that most reach for in a time of weakness are usually not the best for you. Better options are available than potato chips and candy bars. In fact, the American Heart Association says that, “snacking isn’t ‘bad’ if you do it in moderation and make healthy choices.”

Healthy Snack Options

Craving a crunch?

Apples and peanut butter

Carrots and celery sticks

Unsalted rice cakes

Have the munchies?

Unsalted nuts – almonds and walnuts are particularly good options

Plain, low-fat or fat-free yogurt

Cherry tomatoes

Whole-grain breads or toast

Want to quench your thirst?

Water, water is always the best option

Fat-free milk

Fresh-squeezed or unsweetened juices

Low-sodium vegetable juice

Looking to satisfy a sweet tooth?

Dried fruit gelatin gems

Raisins

Frozen grapes or bananas

Baked apple

Thin slice of angel food cake

<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/HealthyEating/Healthy-Snacking_UCM_301489_Article.jsp>