



Take heart care in hand for good life

HEART disease is the number one cause of death in the United States, with one third of all first heart attacks being fatal. The major risk factors, starting with the worst, are: smoking, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol (due to high levels of LDL cholesterol), lack of exercise, and obesity.

Recent information also indicates vitamins B6, B12, and folate are essential for preventing excess buildup of the compound homocysteine. High levels of this chemical have been associated with damaging blood vessels even when blood cholesterol is normal. This is associated with a genetic sensitivity that may be an important factor for possibly 12 percent to 14 percent of the population.

Here are 10 steps that can help to lower blood cholesterol, strengthen your heart muscle, and deal with possible genetic predisposition to heart disease:

1. Choose parents with the right genes. Many of us know people in their 90's who live like there is no tomorrow. They smoke, drink, eat anything and everything. They don't know what the inside of a doctor's office looks like. A gambler might call this "the luck of the draw." But no matter what genetic

hand you have been dealt, you can increase your long-term health potential by living somewhat in moderation.

2. Never start smoking. Or stop smoking no matter how long you've been smoking. It is well documented that smoking is the number one cause of heart disease. Also too much exposure to second-hand smoke can play a role in heart disease. Smoke damages the strength of blood vessel walls. Blood cholesterol and plaque can build up at damage sites. Preventing this initial damage is the first step to a healthy circulation.

3. Find out if you have high blood pressure. If so, then work with your physician to lower it. This may include medications or decreasing dietary salt intake if you are salt sensitive.

4. Decrease the total amount fat in the diet. This is likely the most important dietary consideration to decreasing blood cholesterol.

5. Eat in moderation and make sure to include a variety of foods including fruits, vegetables, and adequate fluids.

6. Take a dietary supplement that includes 400 micrograms folate, 1.5 to 2 mg vitamin B6 and 2 micrograms vitamin B12.

7. Exercise in moderation regularly. That means walk, swim, play tennis, park at the far end of the parking lot and walk to the store, dance, anything that gets you moving. At the minimum, try to exercise 2 to 3 minutes a day for every hour you sit. This means sitting in front of a computer, television, driving, reading, sunbathing, etc.

8. Maintain a healthy weight or lose weight if you are not at a healthy weight.

9. Care enough about yourself to figure out how to decrease your stress level. This may require input from family, friends, or appropriate professionals. For example, if you have career problems, talk to a career counselors, someone doing what you think looks like it would be fulfilling, or read any of the series "What Color Is Your Parachute" by Richard Nelson Bolles.

10. Make happy memories each day. We live in paradise with an incredible ocean, beautiful beaches and parks, breathtaking sunsets, fantastic music and hula and people with aloha spirit. But no matter where you live, happy memories can put the worst days in perspective.

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D, CNS and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D, CNS
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service.
