

Heart Disease: America's #1 Killer

Can we lower our risk of heart disease through nutrition? The answer is yes. Fortunately, there are many risk factors you can change and nutrition is one that can be done fairly easily. First, a good, healthy eating plan consisting of lean proteins, high-fiber grains, carbohydrates and some good sources of fat will keep the body lean and trim. Ultimately, lowering the risk of clogged arteries. Many high fat, fried foods cause build up in the arteries and eventually lead to heart disease. Choosing 1% or skim milk, low-fat cheeses, egg whites instead of whole eggs and lean sources of meat should lower cholesterol and of course, keep your heart healthy and rid of excess fat. Along with some of the food choice changes, you must change the consistency of your eating patterns. Eating smaller meals more often will help keep your body in that fat burning mode.



CAN EXERCISE ALONG WITH CHANGES IN THE DIET HELP LOWER YOUR RISK OF HEART DISEASE? Of course, exercise is one of the key elements to longevity and ultimately key to keeping your heart healthy. Studies have proven that sedentary people are more apt to develop heart disease than those who are consistent with their exercise. Three times per week of cardiovascular workouts would lower ones risk of heart disease tremendously.

WHAT OTHER RISK FACTORS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO HEART DISEASE

1. High blood pressure - Have it checked periodically. Lower your daily stress level. A 140/190 blood pressure result or higher from your physician for more than 3 consistent visits is considered hypertension.
2. Cigarette smoking - Flat out- don't do it!! If you do not want to be in the 70% risk level for heart attacks, then quit smoking! If you stop smoking, your risk level will drop almost to the level of a non-smoker within five years.
3. Cholesterol - A blood cholesterol level of 200 or less is a guideline to follow as acceptable. If your cholesterol total is above 240, you could possibly be in a higher risk category for heart disease. Please see the handout specifically about cholesterol to give you more specifics on how to lower your total cholesterol.
4. Obesity - Unfortunately, many deaths have occurred due to heart disease as a result of obesity. Clinical obesity is usually defined as an overall body-fat percentage of 30% or higher. Lack of exercise and overeating are direct contributors to obesity. Have your body-fat tested by a qualified professional to make sure you are not at risk.
5. Lack of Exercise - As most of you know, you must "move your body" in order to prevent many conditions, not just heart disease. Increasing your activity level will lower your risk of heart disease tremendously.

Of course, now you say to yourself- "How do I change some important factors such as age, gender, and family history?"- Well, you cannot!! Men at the age of 45 or older who have a family history of heart disease (mother, father, brother or sister who died of heart disease before age of 45-50) are at a higher risk of developing heart disease. Estrogen seems to play a role in keeping women before menopause at a lower risk. If you fall into any of these unalterable categories, focus on changing the risk factors that are in your control. Increase your activity level, lower your fat intake and quit smoking and you will be surprised how you can overcome some of the genetic factors and live a longer, healthier life.