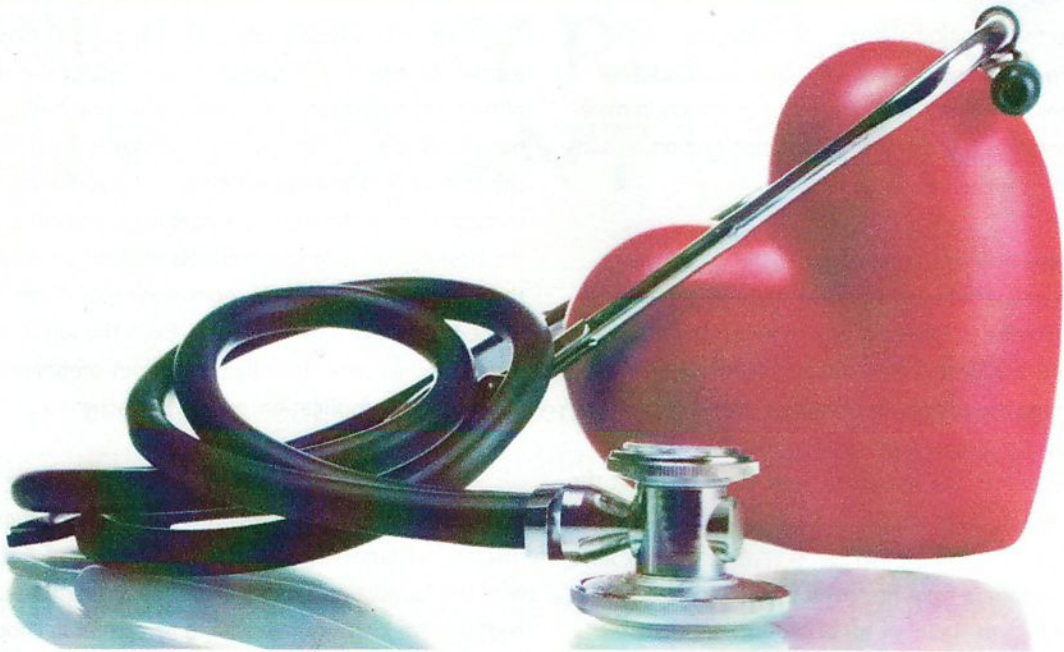


Healthy Heart

MYTHS, RISK FACTORS AND BASICS FOR A HEALTHY CARDIOVASCULAR SYSTEM



Did you know that the leading cause of death worldwide is cardiovascular disease? You need to know that the physical condition of your arteries determines the potential for future adverse cardiovascular events. As Sir William Osler said, "You're only as old as your arteries." Hence, the health of your cardiovascular system will greatly rely on how you took good care of it in the past.

Some of the 8 risk factors that you need to watch out for to have a healthy heart and arteries include the following:

- Hypertension
- Hyperlipidemia
- Diabetes
- Cigarette smoking
- Diet
- Weight
- Activity Level
- Mental Well Being

Though the first four factors are known to cause cardiovascular problems, you need to understand that failure to check the last 4 factors will give you the same degree of consequences. For this reason, anybody may acquire certain types of heart and arterial problems if one fails to live a healthy lifestyle.

Common Myth that Needs to Be Corrected

We tend to consider the benefit of "diet and exercise" largely as a "means" to lower cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar levels. That should not be the case. "Diet and exercise" should be looked upon as an "end" in and of itself for improving cardiovascular health beyond the effect it has on one's "numbers". That is because prudent lifestyle modifications have a direct beneficial effect on the health of one's arteries and serve to reduce the tendencies for plaque growth (atherosclerosis) and consequent rupture (causing heart attacks). While there is an inherent limit as to how much "diet and exercise" can alter one's blood pressure, lipid and glucose levels, there is no such limit to the improvement in one's cardiovascular health by achieving the proper balance of diet and exercise.

Start With the Basics

Protecting your heart doesn't have to be such a big momentous event. It is how you live each day of your life. Obviously, you cannot change your genetic set up but you can do a lot to change your lifestyle. You need to find ways to exercise and to eat a healthy diet even if you feel like you do not have the time to do so. Reducing stress and enhancing one's mental well being is extremely important. You need to know that chronic stress can contribute to arterial plaque growth and consequently arterial rupture. If you don't have the time to go to the gym, park your car further from where you are going or climb stairs instead of using the elevator. And if you do rigid trainings, make sure that you will not be at a level or intensity that leads to pain either during or subsequent to your workout. Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains and good sources of proteins and fats instead of taking a "low fat diet" or "low carb diet". Furthermore, if you want to lose weight, know how to eat less.

Points to Remember

You need to realize that the health that you have today is the result of the decisions that you have made in the past. If you have decided to ignore the idea of eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and watching out for the risk factors that can lead to cardiovascular illness, then you may develop a cardiovascular disorder one of these days. **WR**

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