

The Wellness Exchange



A Publication of
BUSINESS HEALTH SERVICES™

Solutions for a Healthier Workplace™

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Loving Your Heart

Understanding and Preventing Heart Disease

Heart disease affects the quality of life of millions of Americans and is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. The disease can go unnoticed for months or years until it causes severe symptoms. That's why it's often called "the silent killer." The development of heart disease is related to the way we live. Changing to a healthier lifestyle will help prevent both new and repeat heart problems. February, National Heart Month, is the ideal time to remind everyone that there are things we can do to prevent heart disease.

Understanding Heart Disease



Heart disease is any disorder that affects the heart's ability to function normally. The most common cause of heart disease is narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries, which supply blood to the heart itself.

Symptoms of Heart Disease

The term heart disease is often used as a synonym for coronary heart disease or coronary artery disease. But in fact, the reduced blood flow caused by atherosclerosis (a cholesterol buildup within the arteries, often referred to as "hardening of the arteries") can lead to several types of heart conditions with differing symptoms:

Angina: A condition in which the heart muscle is temporarily deprived of oxygen. Angina often involves tightness, heaviness or pain in the chest, arm or shoulder. Symptoms may also include sweating, shortness of breath, heart palpitations and dizziness.

Heart failure: A chronic, progressive condition that occurs when the heart doesn't pump as much blood as the body needs. Symptoms may include intolerance to exercise, fatigue, shortness of breath and fluid retention. You may notice swelling in the legs or congestion in the lungs. In many cases, the heart compensates by beating harder and faster than normal.

Heart attack: Death in part of the heart muscle after it fails to receive adequate blood flow. Symptoms may include: uncomfortable pressure, fullness, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest lasting more than a few minutes; pain spreading to the shoulders, neck or arms; chest discomfort with lightheadedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath.

Many women report chest pressure without the crushing pain described by men. Some women also report atypical symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, abdominal pain or fatigue.

Risk Factors of Heart Disease

Heart disease is often related to a complex combination of factors.

Risk factors within your control include:

- **Smoking**
- **High blood pressure**
- **High cholesterol**
- **Physical activity**
- **Being overweight**



Factors beyond your control include:

- **Family history** of heart disease.
- **Age** - most people who die from heart disease are older than age 64.
- **Sex** - generally, men have a higher risk than women.
- **Ethnicity** - statistically, African Americans are at greater risk than Caucasians, Hispanics and Asian Americans.

For more information on Heart Disease, visit the American Heart Association at www.heart.org.

Preventing Heart Disease

Fortunately, you have direct control over many risk factors for heart disease. Preventing heart disease often begins with lifestyle changes, such as quitting smoking, getting regular exercise and eating healthfully. Consider these suggestions to reduce the risk of atherosclerosis and its consequences:

Don't smoke. Smoking contributes to many of the risk factors for heart disease.

Eat smart. A diet that is high in cholesterol and fat, especially saturated fat, increases blood cholesterol and contributes to artery disease - the main cause of heart attacks. Try eating more whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables instead.

Exercise regularly. When paired with smart eating, physical activity can help control your weight. In turn, this can lower blood pressure and reduce other heart disease risk factors.

Track your numbers. Consult your doctor at least once a year for precise measurements of your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. In some cases, your doctor may recommend more frequent monitoring.

Reduce stress. Evidence links stress with many diseases, including heart disease. Slowing down, making time for family, and cultivating positive relationships may improve your health and raise your quality of life. An important key to keeping your heart physically healthy is to nurture it emotionally.





Heart Healthy Relationships

For more information call 1-800-765-3277 or visit www.bhsonline.com

Healthy Relationships



Relationships are a vital part of our lives at any age. Each relationship brings a unique past, which in turn, provides a strong influence on

what we expect in our close relationships.

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between healthy relationships and heart disease. **Stress can play a major role in heart and cardiovascular disease.** Negative relationships tend to cause high levels of stress, increasing blood pressure, which contributes to heart or cardiovascular disease. Studies have shown that people who share healthy relationships (especially among significant others and their family members) are well balanced and positive in their outlook towards life. This healthy outlook relates itself positively into other aspects of their life, thus generally providing better heart healthy results.

Communication is essential for any healthy relationship to be maintained. Communication involves how we express our thoughts, ideas, and feelings to others, including what we say and how we say it. There are really two ways to communicate: **effectively and ineffectively.** Poor communication or no communication within our significant relationships creates tension and **stress!**



The lack of an established network of family and friends predisposes one to stress disorders and stress-related health problems, including heart disease. Relationships require an investment of time and energy; choose the people you spend time with wisely.

Watch Your Stress

Be aware of stress! Stress can increase your heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory rate, all of which make the heart work harder. If the stress response is triggered on a regular basis, you are at an increased risk for cardiovascular disease and thus a heart attack or stroke!

Your body responds to the way you think, feel and act. This is often called the "mind/body connection." When you are stressed, anxious or upset, your body tries to tell you that something isn't right. For example, high blood pressure or a stomach ulcer might develop after a particularly stressful event, such as the death of a loved one. Take inventory of your stress.

Below is a list of physical signs/symptoms that may indicate your emotional health is out of balance. How often are you experiencing:

- Back Pain**
- Chest Pain**
- Dry Mouth**
- Extreme Tiredness**
- Heart Palpitations**
- Constipation or Diarrhea**
- Stiff Neck**
- Shortness of Breath (Anxiety)**
- Sexual Problems**
- Frequent Headaches**
- Weight Gain or Loss**
- Circulatory Problems**

Ask Yourself...

Ask yourself if the relationships that surround you are draining you or do they provide you support? Do you feel good about yourself with those relationships in which you have invested your time?

Making Positive Changes



Most of us recognize that we need constant exercise to remain fit and healthy. What we often overlook is that we also need to "work out"

daily at strengthening relationships.

Here are some ideas to help improve your relationships:

- Show Appreciation**
- Practice Constructive Criticism**
- Avoid Destructive Comments**
- Admit to Mistakes**
- Share Responsibilities**
- Show Respect to One Another**
- Express a Genuine Compliment**
- Have Reasonable Expectations**
- Be Flexible and Adapt to Change**
- Protect the Privacy of Others**

Relationships can create a valuable arena for personal growth and healing. We can learn a lot about ourselves through the relationships we make. Understanding the positive components of our health that are related to our significant relationships is key to understanding our need for change.

Make time for good health and good relationships - it will do your heart good.

Business Health Services (BHS), your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is provided by your employer, as a free and confidential benefit to you and your household members. This benefit provides an opportunity for you to resolve personal or professional problems effectively through confidential assistance.

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