

HEART HEALTH AWARENESS

The month of February is National Heart Health Awareness month. Heart disease or better known as coronary heart disease (CHD) is the number one cause of death in developed countries although there is now a downward trend. Coronary heart disease is caused by blockages or clogging in the arteries that supply blood to the heart which places a person at risk for heart attacks and other forms of heart disease.

Symptoms of coronary heart disease include:

- Pain, pressure or discomfort in the center of the chest
- Pain, tingling or discomfort in other parts of the upper body including the arms, neck, jaw or even stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea, vomiting, burping or heartburn
- Sweating or having cold, clammy skin
- Fast or irregular heart beat
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded

If these symptoms occur and last more than 10 minutes or keep coming and going, dial 9-1-1 for an ambulance. Do not attempt to go to the hospital on your own.

Test for coronary heart disease consist of one or more of these:

- An electrocardiogram (“ECG” or “EKG”) – This test measures the electrical activity of the heart.
- A stress test – During a stress test you run or walk on a treadmill while an EKG measures your heart’s electrical activity. If you cannot walk or run then you could be given a “nuclear medicine stress test” where medicine is given through an I.V. to increase the heart rate as if you were running or walking. Then a second medicine is given through the same I.V. which allows pictures of the heart to be taken with a special nuclear medicine camera which allows areas of the heart to be identified affected by blockages or clogged arteries.
- Cardiac catheterization – Cardiac (heart) catheterization is also known as cardiac “cath” or coronary angiography. During this test a catheter is placed into a wrist or groin area in the upper part of the leg. Dye is then injected through this catheter and the clogged or blocked arteries are seen on an x-ray screen.

There are several treatment options for coronary heart disease, these consist of the following:

- Lifestyle changes – These are some things that you can do to reduce your risk of heart attack and death.
 - Quit smoking if you smoke

- Dietary changes that include more fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy products. Reduce the amount of red meats and fatty foods
- Walk or do some form of physical activity on most days of the week
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Medicines – Some medicines lower the risk of developing coronary heart disease and risk of heart attack. It is very important to take these medications as prescribed.
 - Medicines known as statins lower cholesterol which causes blockages or clogging of arteries
 - Medicines to lower blood pressure
 - Aspirin or other medicines to prevent blood clots from forming in the heart
 - Medicines to treat diabetes if you have diabetes
 - For individuals who have chest pain caused by coronary heart disease (called “angina”), medicines known as “nitrates, beta blockers or calcium channel blockers” may be used to relieve the chest pain
- Angioplasty – During angioplasty, a balloon at the end of a catheter tip is inflated to open areas of blockage. Often a tiny mesh tube called a “stent” is then left in place to keep the blood vessel open.
- Bypass Surgery (also known as “coronary artery bypass grafting” or CABG) – During bypass surgery, a piece of blood vessel from another part of the body is used. This piece of blood vessel is reattached above and below the blockage or clogged artery. This re-routes blood around the blocked or clogged area and allows blood to get to the parts of the heart not getting blood.

If angioplasty or bypass surgery are recommended, it is very important that you as the patient ask these questions:

- What are the benefits of this procedure for me?
- Will the procedure help me live longer?
- Will the procedure reduce my chances of having a heart attack?
- Will I feel better if I have this procedure?
- What are the risks of the procedure?
- What happens if I don’t have this procedure?

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