



Heart Disease-One of The Nation's Leading Killers



February is National Heart Month.

It's never too late to take steps to prevent a heart attack — even if you've already had one. Drug therapy has become an increasingly important part of reducing the risk of a second heart attack and helping a damaged heart function better. Lifestyle factors also play a critical role in heart attack prevention and recovery.

Medications

Doctors typically prescribe drug therapy for people who've had a heart attack or who are at high risk of having one. Medications that help the heart function more effectively or reduce heart attack risk may include:

▪ **Blood-thinning medications.** Aspirin makes your blood less "sticky" and likely to clot. Doctors recommend a daily aspirin for most people who've had a heart attack. Your doctor may prescribe a stronger blood thinner than aspirin.

Doctors may prescribe aspirin and an anti-clotting drug such as clopidogrel (Plavix) for people undergoing an angioplasty to open narrowed coronary arteries, both before

and after the procedure.

If you're taking aspirin to help prevent a heart attack, be aware that a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that the painkiller ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) may undermine aspirin's proven blood-thinning effects. Taken at the same time, ibuprofen appears to interfere with the heart benefits of aspirin. If you need to take a pain-relieving medication for a condition such as arthritis, discuss with your doctor which is best for you.

▪ **Beta blockers.** These drugs lower your heart rate and blood pressure, reducing demand on your heart. You generally need to take beta blockers for one year or more following a heart attack.

▪ **Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors.** Your doctor may prescribe ACE inhibitors if you've had a moderate to severe heart attack that has reduced your heart's pumping capacity. These drugs allow blood to flow from your heart more easily.

▪ **Cholesterol-lowering medications.** A variety of medications, including statins, niacin, fibrates and bile acid sequestrants, can help lower your lev-

els of unwanted blood cholesterol.

The majority of people who've had a heart attack take cholesterol-lowering medications — drugs that help lower the risk of a second heart attack.

▪ **Calcium channel blockers.** These medications help relax the muscle of blood vessels. Some also slow your heart rate.

Lifestyle

How you live your life can largely affect the health of your heart. Taking the following steps can help you not only prevent but also recover from a heart attack:

▪ **Get regular medical checkups.** Some of the main risk factors for heart attack — high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes — cause no symptoms in their early stages. But your doctor can perform tests to check that you're free of these conditions. If a problem exists, you and your doctor can manage it early to prevent complications that can lead to a heart attack.

▪ **Control your blood pressure.** Have your blood pressure checked every two years. Your doctor may recommend more frequent measurement if you have high blood pressure or a his-

tory of coronary artery disease. Normal blood pressure with respect to cardiovascular risk is 115/75 mm Hg.

▪ **Check your cholesterol.** Have your blood cholesterol levels checked regularly, through a blood test at your doctor's office. If "bad" cholesterol levels are undesirably high, your doctor can prescribe changes to your diet and medications to help lower the numbers and protect your cardiovascular health.

In addition to standard cholesterol blood work-up, your doctor may order a cholesterol screening called the C-reactive protein (CRP) blood test. This test measures the level of C-reactive protein in your blood. Too much of this protein in your bloodstream may indicate inflammation of the arteries — a potential precursor to a heart attack.

▪ **Don't smoke.** If you smoke, the single most important thing you can do to improve your heart's health is to stop. Smoking causes nearly one in five deaths from heart disease. If you can't stop smoking by yourself, ask your doctor to prescribe a treatment plan to help you kick the habit.

Reference made to product names only for educational purposes and are not an endorsement.

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Your Heart and How It Works

The normal heart is a strong, hard-working pump made of muscle tissue. about the size of a person's fist.

The heart has 4 chambers. The upper 2 chambers are the right atrium and left atrium, and the lower 2 are the right ventricle and left ventricle (see diagram). Blood is pumped through the chambers, aided by 4 heart valves. The valves open and close to let the blood flow in only 1 direction.

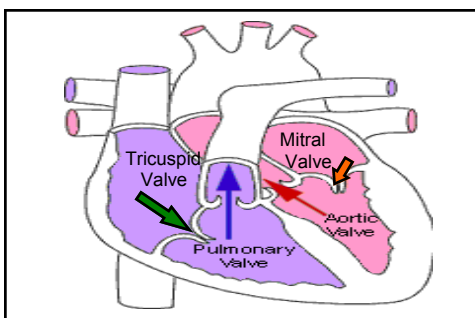
The four heart valves are:

1. the tricuspid valve, located between the right atrium and the right ventricle
2. the pulmonary (pulmonic) valve, between the right ventricle and the pulmonary artery
3. the mitral valve, between the left atrium and left ventricle
4. the aortic valve, between the left ventricle and the aorta.

Each valve has a set of "flaps" (also called leaflets or cusps). The mitral valve normally has 2 flaps;

the others have 3 flaps.

Dark bluish blood, low in oxygen, flows back to the heart after circulating through the body. It returns to the heart through veins and enters the right atrium. This chamber empties blood through the tricuspid valve into the right ventricle.



The right ventricle pumps the blood under low pressure through the pulmonary valve into the pulmonary artery. From there the blood goes to the lungs where it gets fresh oxygen. After the blood is refreshed with oxygen, it's

bright red. Then it returns by the pulmonary veins to the left atrium. From there it passes through the mitral valve and enters the left ventricle.

The left ventricle pumps the red oxygen-rich blood out through the aortic valve into the aorta). The aorta takes blood to the body's general circulation. The blood pressure in the left ventricle is the same as the pressure measured in the arm.

Heart Attack

A heart attack is an injury to the heart muscle caused by a loss of blood supply. It usually occurs when a blood clot blocks the flow of blood through a coronary artery — a blood vessel that feeds blood to a part of the heart muscle. Interrupted blood flow to your heart can damage or destroy a part of the heart muscle. It can also be fatal.

Each year about one million Americans experience a heart attack. Today the vast majority of people who

have a heart attack survive.

If you or someone you're with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don't wait longer than a few minutes (no more than 5) before calling for help. Call 9-1-1... Get to a hospital right away.

Calling 9-1-1 is almost always the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services staff can begin treatment when they arrive -- up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. The staff are also trained to revive someone whose heart has stopped. Patients with chest pain who arrive by ambulance usually receive faster treatment at the hospital, too.

If you can't access the emergency medical services (EMS), have someone drive you to the hospital right away. If you're the one having symptoms, don't drive yourself, unless you have absolutely no other option.

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