

HEALTH

Diet and lifestyle choices can reduce the risk of heart disease

By Dr. Maria A. Martinez

While other illnesses make more headlines, heart disease is actually the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States.

The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that 1.25 million Americans suffer heart attacks each year and that about 500,000 die of coronary heart disease, which causes heart attacks.

These alarming facts figure to receive increased attention during February, which the American Heart Association has designated as American Heart Month. Throughout the month, association volunteers across the country will canvass neighborhoods and provide educational information about cardiovascular disease and stroke. Since this year's campaign will focus on the early warning signs of heart attack and stroke, it seems like the perfect time to pass on important information about heart disease and how to combat it.

Several factors increase your chances of developing cardiovascular disease. And some of the biggest risk factors are things that we can change about ourselves. These warning signs include smoking and using tobacco products, obesity, lack of exercise, high blood pressure, diabetes and a high cholesterol level.

Of course, heredity has a lot to do with some of these traits. But what often frustrates health care professionals is that many people make diet and lifestyle choices that can lead to heart problems. A good example is a person's cholesterol level, which stems partly from their family history but mostly from their diet.

Unhealthy levels of cholesterol are more common in people who are overweight, inactive and eat fatty foods. Many popular foods are actually high in fat and cholesterol. They include beef, pork, lamb, sausage, bacon, egg yolks (not egg whites), whole milk, cheese, ice cream, butter, lard and many

desserts. The way we cook and prepare food can also affect our cholesterol levels. For example, fried chicken is much higher in cholesterol than baked, grilled and skinless chicken.

If you eat a lot of these foods — or if any of the risk factors mentioned above apply to you — you should have a doctor check your cholesterol level. In fact, most health care experts recommend that everyone older than 20 should have their cholesterol level measured at least once every five years.

If a doctor determines that your cholesterol level is high, you can reduce it by changing your diet and eliminating high-risk habits like smoking. Doctors can also prescribe medication that can lower cholesterol level.

We'd be happy to discuss any of these issues with you at Stewart Medical Center, a new health care facility at Stewart

and Eastern Avenues, that is doing its part to combat heart disease and related problems. During the month of February, the center is offering free cholesterol screenings to anyone who visits our office at 2404 E. Stewart Avenue, Suite 102. Just stop by Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. Within a day of your blood test, we'll have your results.

This is in addition to the free blood pressure screenings Stewart Medical Center provides for senior citizens every Wednesday during February.

Please take advantage of these free health screenings. After all, the best way to combat health problems is to prevent them.

Dr. Maria A. Martinez, M.D., is the medical director of Stewart Medical Center, a new health care facility at Stewart and Eastern Avenues.

Weight Watchers Celebrates With North Las Vegas

The North Las Vegas Recreation Division asked Weight Watchers to help residents achieve their New Year's resolution of a commitment to living a healthier lifestyle in 1996.

"While it may seem outrageous to begin a weight loss effort with a celebration, you are really celebrating the fact that you are NOT ON A DIET," says Reva C. Schwartz, President, CEO of Weight Watchers Southern Nevada & Southern Utah. "Instead, we are going to show you how to focus on lifestyle changes that include a healthier food plan and increased physical activity, along with a realistic weight

loss goal and lots of positive motivation."

The celebration party takes place at the North Las Vegas Recreation Center, 1638 N. Bruce Street. Anyone who joins Weight Watchers at that meeting will get a free registration, a savings of up to twenty-two dollars. This exciting celebration registration incentive will only be available through February 14, 1996. Everyone is invited to join in for the 1996 celebration of a "commitment to living a healthier lifestyle" at the grand opening of the center at the North Las Vegas Recreation Center. For more information, call the recreation staff at 649-7737 or Weight Watchers at 736-6684.

African American Health Briefs

FAT REDUCTION MAY HELP PREVENT PROSTATE CANCER

Men who restrict fat in their diets may lower their risk for prostate cancer, which occurs more often in black men than in other groups. A six-month study at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston sought to determine if limiting fat intake to 20 percent of calories would reduce levels of prostate specific antigen, a blood marker used to indicate

prostate-cancer risk.

"In patients with really elevated PSA, we observed a 10 percent reduction," said Dr. Dov Kadmon, a urologist.

Prostate cancer is the major killer of men 50 and older. Kadmon suggests that all men 50 and older be screened annually for prostate cancer using a PSA blood test and a digital rectal examination. Black men, as well as any men with a family history of prostate cancer,

should be screened annually beginning at age 40.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR MINORITIES

Minority Collegé students interested in medical careers may apply for the Honors Premedical Academy, a six-week summer program at Baylor College of Medicine and Rice University, both in Houston.

The program, funded in part by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, aims to increase minority participation in medicine by making participants more competitive in the applicant pool.

Students earn nine undergraduate hours. They are paired with Baylor physicians in the morning and take afternoon science and communications classes at Rice. Tuition and housing are free. Applicants must have a 2.75 grade-point average and a 3.0 GPA in their majors. They must demonstrate a serious interest in medicine and be African-American, Mexican-American, mainland Puerto Rican or Native American. Additional information is available by calling 1-800-798-8244. The application deadline is April 1.

NUTRITION, DETECTION CAN REDUCE COLORECTAL-CANCER DEATHS

Proper nutrition and early detection can reduce colorectal-cancer deaths in all people, including black men, who have a higher incidence of the disease.

"A first step is diet," said Dr. John I. Hughes of Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"Preparing high-fiber foods instead of fried and other fatty foods may lessen the risk."

Only one in 10 of all Americans eats the recommended daily allowance of fruits and vegetables, according to the National Cancer Institute; the percentage appears to be even lower among African-Americans.

Colorectal-cancer warning signs include:

- Rectal pain or bleeding.
- Bloody stools or frequent narrowing of stools.
- Changes in bowel habits or a feeling of incomplete emptying after bowel movements.
- Unexplained weight loss, paleness and fatigue.

HEALTH TIPS

VACCINE AGAINST HEPATITIS B RECOMMENDED FOR PRE-TEENS

Most parents of pre-teens are aware of the dangers of HIV. But many don't know about hepatitis B, an even more widespread sexually transmitted virus — or that there is a vaccine to prevent it, says a Stanford University pediatrics expert.

The vaccine should be given between ages 11 and 13, "before high-risk behavior begins," says Dr. Ann M. Arvin, chief of Infectious Disease Services at Lucile Salter Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford.

Most parents don't like to think of their children as sexually active or involved in drug use, says Arvin. "But parents have to realize their kids could be doing lots of things they don't know about. Experimentation is the definition of adolescence."

Hepatitis B virus (HBV), which is 100 times more prevalent and considerably more infectious than HIV, is spread

the same way as the AIDS virus, through blood and body fluids, most often from drug use or sex. An estimated 300 million are infected worldwide, 1.5 million in the United States.

Many of those who are infected experience acute illness, and a significant proportion develop chronic liver disease. Perhaps 2 percent die. "I don't think anybody wants to be in that 2 percent risk group, especially when there is an effective vaccine," Arvin says.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention endorse routine inoculation of

OVERWEIGHT TEENS DO NOT REALIZE HEALTH RISK

Many overweight African American teenagers do not realize obesity is a health risk, says a behavioral psychologist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"They know they have a weight problem, but don't think about the health consequences," said Dr. John Foreyt, a professor of medicine at Baylor.

Misperceptions about obesity differ greatly among black and white teenagers. Studies show that 40 percent of obese African

hepatitis B vaccine for newborns and recently began urging it for teens. "Vaccination has become routine for newborns, but we're still playing catch-up with teenagers," Arvin says.

RELIEVE ARTHRITIS PAIN BY WALKING, SAYS HEALTH EDUCATOR

Walking won't cure people with arthritis, but by following a few simple rules, they can relieve their pain and improve their health in several ways by using their feet, says the director of the Stanford Patient Education Research Center.

"Some of the pain of arthritis is caused by weak, tense

American females and 36 percent of the males perceived themselves as healthy, compared to nearly 100 percent and 78 percent of obese white females and males, respectively.

Adolescence is a critical time of adult obesity development for many African American teens. Eighty percent of obese teenagers are likely to grow into overweight adults, especially women. According to the National Center for Health (See *Overweight Teens*, Pg 7)

muscles that are trying to protect joints. Walking strengthens those muscles and helps them to relax," says Kate Lorig, associate professor of medicine.

"Many people with arthritis also feel frustrated and depressed, and a walk can be a great mood elevator. Walking also will help promote sleep."

"Not walking — remaining inactive — can make arthritis worse and harm your overall health," says Lorig, who is a registered nurse in addition to being an arthritis expert and health educator.

A few words of caution are in order, however. "The first rule for walking off arthritis pain is that you should feel no more pain after you walk than you felt before you started," she says. "So start your program carefully, even if you start only with one minute. Remember, your exercise will not be pain free."

Lorig says aim to add about 10 to 20 percent to walking time every few weeks. If you can walk only one minute without increasing pain," she says, "it's best to build slowly by walking one minute every hour while you are awake. Add one or two minutes every two weeks. When you can walk five minutes at a time with no increased pain, you may successfully cut back to one walk per day four days a week. But continue to build time.

"And if you've reached a certain level and pain starts to increase, cut your walking time down until the pain no longer increases," Lorig adds. "Arthritis is not necessarily progressive. You may find after a period of reduced walking that you're ready to walk more again."

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