

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Heart Disease

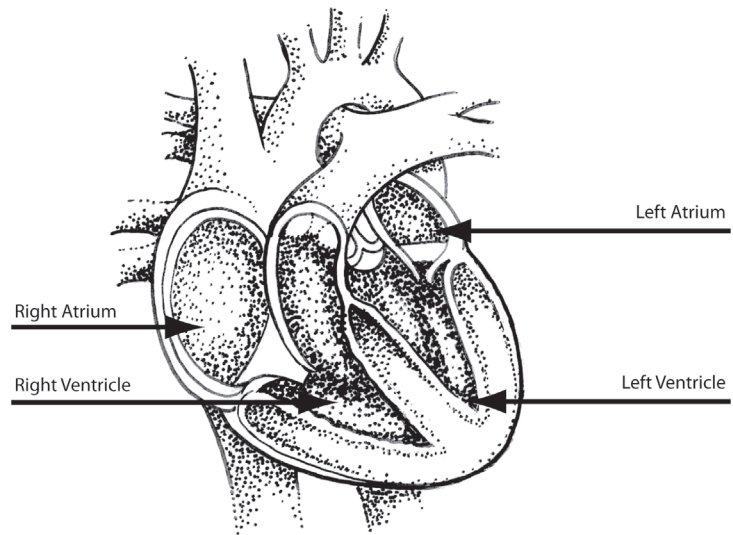
Imagine the normal heart as the body's engine. A healthy, normal heart beats between 60 and 80 times per minute. Taking care of yourself keeps your heart healthy. Sometimes, despite proper maintenance, problems still develop.

## Heart Disease Complications

Cardiovascular disease kills more people than all cancers combined and is the No. 1 cause of death and disability in the U.S. One in three American adults has high blood pressure, which is also called *hypertension*. High blood pressure increases the risk for heart disease and stroke, the first and third leading causes of death in the U.S.

- **Heart failure.** One of the most common complications of heart disease, occurs when your heart can't pump enough blood to meet your body's needs.
- **Heart attack.** A blood clot blocking the blood flow through a blood vessel that feeds the heart causes a heart attack, possibly damaging or destroying a part of the heart muscle.
- **Stroke.** Happens when the arteries to your brain are narrowed or blocked so that too

The Body's Engine



little blood reaches the brain or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts and floods the brain. Brain tissue begins to die within just a few minutes of a stroke.

- **Aneurysm.** A bulge in the wall of an artery and if it bursts, there may be life-threatening internal bleeding.
- **Peripheral artery disease.** Usually in the legs which don't receive enough blood flow.
- **Sudden cardiac arrest.** The sudden, unexpected loss of heart function, breathing and consciousness. If not treated *immediately*, it is fatal, resulting in sudden cardiac death.

Source: Mayo Clinic; CDC

## American Heart Association

Provides resources for caregivers to help them care for someone who has heart disease, or who has experienced a heart attack, heart surgery or a stroke. Visit [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org).

Article continues  
on page 2

## Change What You Can for a Healthy Heart

The best way to have a healthy heart is to reduce the risk factors that are *controllable*. Encourage a diet, exercise, and weight-loss program that works for the person.

**Exercise** A new study in JAMA finds that a *sedentary* lifestyle is worse for your health than smoking, diabetes and heart disease. Being unfit should be treated almost as a disease that has a *prescription*—called **exercise**.

**Medication** Fill prescriptions on time (to avoid running out) and be diligent that the person in your care takes medication *exactly* as directed.

**Blood Pressure** Monitor blood pressure on a daily basis if ordered by the doctor.

**Cholesterol** Cholesterol is a major factor in coronary artery disease. High cholesterol numbers may be reduced through appropriate diet, regular exercise, and weight loss and— cholesterol-lowering drugs.

**Salt (Sodium) Consumption** When an individual consumes too much sodium, extra fluid builds up in the body, which causes the heart to work harder.

**Diabetes** People with diabetes are more than *twice* as likely to develop heart failure as people without diabetes. Make sure that you and the person in your care are tested for diabetes.

**Depression** People with heart disease and their caregivers have depression at much higher rates than the general public. One important reason to treat depression is that it is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

**Smoking and Alcohol Abuse** Cigarette smoking is a *major, preventable* risk factor for heart disease. The nicotine and carbon monoxide in tobacco smoke reduce the oxygen in a person's blood, so smoking robs the heart of oxygen. Second-hand smoke is just as dangerous as first-hand smoke; therefore, ***if you or the person in your care smoke, get help to quit NOW!***

**Alcohol** Can damage the cells of the heart and make it harder for the heart to pump. Therefore, people with heart failure are advised to quit drinking alcohol.

*Source: The Comfort of Home for Chronic Heart Failure*

## NOTE

Changing habits is not easy, but it is very important to follow through with the recommendations and treatment plan made by the health care team. These lifestyle changes and medications can decrease symptoms of the person in your care and the frequency of hospital stays. Complying with the doctors' recommendation and treatment plan can improve the quality of life for the person in your care.

## Taking Care of Yourself—Yoga and the Heart

Yoga's combination of stretching, gentle activity, breathing, and mindfulness may have special benefits for people with cardiovascular disease.

Getting into the various postures during a yoga session gently exercises the muscles. Anything that works your muscles is good for your heart and blood vessels.

The deep-breathing exercises help slow the breathing rate. Taking fewer but deeper breaths each minute temporarily lowers blood pressure and calms the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for generating stress hormones.

Find a class with a qualified yoga instructor who can meet your health needs and limitations.

## Snow Shoveling Danger

Snow shoveling puts heavy demands on the cardiovascular system and can raise heart rates to dangerous levels after only two minutes. Freezing temperatures that constrict blood vessels put more stress on the heart. Individuals over the age of 40 or who are relatively inactive should be particularly careful. If you feel tightness in the chest or dizziness, stop immediately.

Source: *American Journal of Emergency Medicine*

## Live Life Laughing!

For children, is there any happiness which is not also noise?



## Inspiration

*If you haven't any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble.*

~ Bob Hope

## Memory Care

If the behavior of a person with Alzheimer's changes suddenly or if a symptom appears that usually occurs much later in the illness, THINK MEDICAL ILLNESS and call the doctor.

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## **SAFETY TIPS— Heart Attack**

Warning signs of a heart attack can be both sudden and intense or they can start out with mild aches and pains and develop slowly. Recognize these warning signs and report them immediately by calling 911:

- New chest pain or discomfort that lasts longer than 15 minutes and is not relieved by rest or medication
- Discomfort in other areas of the body (jaw, neck, back or arm)
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea/vomiting or lightheadedness
- Fainting spell or loss of consciousness

About every 26 seconds, an American will suffer a coronary event, and about every minute someone will die from one.

Calling 911 is almost always the fastest way to get lifesaving treatment. Emergency medical services (EMS) staff can begin treatment when they arrive — up to an hour sooner than if someone gets to the hospital by car. EMS 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. It is best to call EMS for rapid transport to the emergency room.

*Source: American Heart Association*