

Simple Steps For Heart Health

By Dr. Arjuna Veeravagu

Despite the large increase in low-fat eating over the last few decades, heart disease is on the rise and remains a leading cause of death in Canada. Extensive research now shows that other factors may play a large role in the maintenance of cardiovascular health, including the types of dietary fat consumed, prolonged stress and blood sugar imbalances. There are also new laboratory tests available that can assist in monitoring one's heart health.

Eat Healthy Fats

Much more important than the quantity of fat consumed in the diet is the quality. The typical Canadian diet is deficient in omega-3 fatty acids, which are found mainly in fish and to a lesser extent in flax and other plant oils. There is now extensive research linking the daily intake of a fish oil supplement with a significantly reduced risk of heart disease. In addition, poor quality fats such as synthetic trans fatty acids found in processed and fast foods should be avoided as they increase heart disease risk.

Manage Stress Levels


Prolonged stress elevations can lead to an increase in the hormone cortisol, which is produced by the body's adrenal glands. High cortisol levels can lead to increased cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar and overall risk of heart disease. Reducing cortisol is possible by eliminating stressors, decreasing sugar and refined carbohydrate intake, increasing aerobic exercise, and practicing mind-body techniques such as meditation, yoga or tai chi.

Balance Blood Sugar

Type 2 (or non-insulin dependent) diabetes is exploding in incidence and is largely due to poor diet and insufficient

exercise. A pre-diabetic state (known as insulin resistance or Metabolic Syndrome) can occur for many years prior to an actual diabetes diagnosis and leads to an increased risk of heart disease. This syndrome involves blood sugar elevations along with weight gain, cholesterol imbalances, and high blood pressure. Therefore maintaining optimal blood sugar through a healthy diet and regular aerobic exercise will not only help prevent diabetes but possibly heart disease as well.

Assessing Your Heart Health

The typical medical assessment of cardiovascular health involves measuring only cholesterol and triglyceride levels. New cardiovascular tests including homocysteine, C-reactive protein and lipoprotein-A can provide a more comprehensive assessment of overall heart health status. Also a new breath test called the DiaTest is a more accurate and sensitive measure of insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome than fasting blood sugar levels. Consult your naturopathic physician for more information about these testing options and how they may benefit you. 

References:

Ravnskov, Uffe MD PhD. The Cholesterol Myths. New Trends Publishing, 2000.
Enig, Mary PhD. Know Your Fats. Bethesda Press, 2000.
Omega-Research.com



Dr. Arjuna Veeravagu is a naturopathic physician, registered acupuncturist and founder of Sage Clinic in Yaletown. More information about Sage Clinic can be found at www.sageclinic.com. To schedule a consultation with Dr. Veeravagu please email info@sageclinic.com or call (604) 697-0397.