



Maintaining A Healthy Heart

by Michael K. Murphy, D.O.

(NAPSA)—Heart disease affects more than 63 million Americans and claims the lives of one out of two adults each year. These staggering statistics make heart disease the number one killer in the United States, above AIDS and cancer deaths combined.

Many Americans do not realize that some of their daily habits can greatly increase the likelihood of contracting this disease. However, adopting healthy habits, or what I call “practicing prevention,” can significantly reduce your chances of contracting heart disease.

To maintain a healthy heart, you must be aware of the risk factors for heart disease. There are several you cannot change, such as increasing age, genetics and ethnicity. Heart disease is more likely to occur amongst people ages 65 and older, menopausal women, diabetics, people with a family history of heart disease, African Americans and Hispanics.

There are, however, risk factors you *can* control, such as smoking or drinking alcohol. If you are a chronic drinker or smoker, or are continually exposed to secondhand smoke, you are putting yourself at a greater risk for heart disease.

In addition, risk factors related to physical inactivity and poor nutrition—such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity and stress—greatly increase your likelihood of getting heart disease. Modifying your schedule to include exercise and a proper diet reduces these risk factors, allowing you to maintain a heart-healthy lifestyle.

There are three basic types of exercise: stretching, strengthening and aerobic. Stretching exercises lengthen muscles and improve flexibility. Strengthening exercises tone muscles and improve strength. Aerobic exercise strengthens the heart muscle specifically, making it the most beneficial type of exercise for preventing heart disease.

Doing aerobic exercises, such as walking, jogging or low-impact aerobics will improve your circulation and breathing, lower blood pressure and help your body use oxygen better. You can also combine aerobic exercises with stretching



Maintaining your overall health will reduce the risk factors associated with heart disease.

and/or strengthening exercises to create a well-rounded workout routine. Following a regular exercise routine will make you feel healthier and more energetic, while combatting the factors that put your health at risk.

You also need to monitor what you eat because it does affect your heart's health. A good nutrition program can lower cholesterol, blood pressure and body fat. Eating healthy foods like fruits, vegetables and legumes, balancing your intake of animal, fish and vegetable sources of protein, and making sure that you limit your intake of foods that are high in cholesterol, sugar and saturated fats are recommended.

Maintaining your overall health will reduce the risk factors associated with heart disease and help you achieve a more fulfilling lifestyle. Still, it's a good idea to consult your physician for a formal health assessment before beginning an exercise and diet program.

D.O.s are fully licensed physicians able to prescribe medication and perform surgery. They treat people, not just symptoms.

To learn more about D.O.s and osteopathic medicine, visit the American Osteopathic Association's Web site at www.aoa-net.org or call toll-free 1-800-621-1773.

Dr. Michael K. Murphy, a retired Navy Captain, is a board-certified osteopathic family physician and is currently the dean of the College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery, Des Moines University in Des Moines, Iowa.