

♥HEART HEALTH

Prevention Key In The Fight Against Heart Disease

(NAPSA)—Heart health is a topic most Americans hear about often, yet despite their knowledge, many simply tell themselves “if it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen.” What they often don’t realize is that heart disease is largely preventable.

“Now more than ever before, we have the tools to stack the deck in favor of prevention,” says Stephen Devries, M.D., preventative cardiologist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute and the Center for Integrative Medicine and Wellness in Chicago.

Devries uses a blend of natural therapies combined with conventional, high-tech therapies when treating patients at risk for heart disease. Some of the nonpharmaceutical approaches he finds most effective are dietary changes, the use of supplements, and treatment aimed at addressing the mind and body connection.

Diet for Risk Reduction

A healthy diet is among the best ways to avoid cholesterol buildup, which can increase your risk of developing heart disease. Doctors recommend limiting nutrient-void foods like sweets and food high in fat and calories, and recommend more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, which contain sterols to help block the absorption of cholesterol.

“Most people underestimate the potency of diet for prevention,” says Devries, who favors a Mediterranean diet that has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease by up to 70 percent. Mediterranean diets include six daily servings of vegetables, two daily servings of fruit, two fish meals per week, exclusive use of olive and canola oils, limited intake of red meat and



no processed carbohydrates such as cereal, soda or white flour.

Supplements

Over-the-counter supplements may be an alternative to prescription cholesterol-lowering medicines for those who are unwilling or unable to take prescriptions due to a history of side effects. Supplements commonly used by Devries include fish oil, red yeast rice extract and plant stanols/sterols.

- **Fish Oil**—The active ingredients are omega-3 fatty acids, called DHA and EPA, which can lower fats called triglycerides and help convert “bad” cholesterol (LDL) to a healthier form. Fish such as salmon, herring and sablefish contain high levels of omega-3 fatty acids.

- **Red Yeast Rice Extract**—Compounds found in this supplement can lower LDL cholesterol levels as much as 20 to 30 percent. Due to potential side effects, this supplement requires regular monitoring with blood tests and should only be taken under doctor supervision.

- **Plant stanols/sterols**—Found in some margarine and in pill form, plant stanols/sterols can lower the absorption of cholesterol in the digestive tract.

Devries cautions that supplements available over the counter

can still cause side effects and should only be taken under a doctor’s supervision.

Beyond Cholesterol

Family history plays a key role in one’s risk of developing heart disease. In addition to standard blood pressure and cholesterol tests, Devries recommends that anyone with a strong family history have additional blood tests to gauge inherited risk. While not widely available, tests such as those to measure Lp(a), a “sticky fat,” C-reactive protein that measures inflammation, and a test for LDL particle size (large, fluffy particles are preferable to small, dense ones) can all be important tools for determining heart disease risk.

“These new blood tests allow us to go far beyond cholesterol to examine very serious inherited risks that were unknown a short time ago, but can now be treated,” says Devries.

Mind/Body Connection

Stress, anger and depression can have a strong impact on heart health that researchers are only just beginning to fully understand. To address the correlation between the mind and body, centers such as Northwestern Memorial’s Bluhm Cardiovascular Institute and the Center for Integrative Medicine and Wellness have incorporated cardiac behavioral medicine into their practice.

“The mind and heart are intricately connected. Stress-reducing techniques such as acupuncture, biofeedback and healing touch can lower stress, reduce blood pressure and keep your heart strong and healthy,” says Devries.

To learn more about heart disease or Dr. Devries, visit www.nmh.org or call (866) 662-8467.