

HEART ATTACK & STROKE PREVENTION

Natural Methods Of Reducing The Risks Of Heart Attack And Stroke

By Devin A. Mikles, MD, MD(H), FACP

Heart attacks and strokes are two manifestations of cardiovascular diseases and these are the number one killers of people in the United States. Many of the risks for these problems can be addressed successfully through natural and often simple means. Indeed the methods of reducing risk for cardiovascular disease can be applied successfully to those that already have the disease. In this article, we will review a model of natural treatment that has been scientifically proven to prevent and reverse heart disease. We will also discuss the specific risks for cardiovascular diseases, and then share with you, the means to eliminate these risks for the most part. Specific nutritional supplements and herbal therapies will be discussed. As always, we will provide you with the references to the scientific literature should you wish to read further and confirm the information in this article.

Wellness Therapy

“Modern medicine is a wonderful thing, but there are two problems: people expect too much of it, and too little of themselves.”

Donald Ardell, High Level Wellness, 1977

The concepts of health promotion, wellness, and prevention are well known. The problem has been the lack of development of a scientific, coherent and consistent model that takes advantage of these concepts in clinical application. Indeed, we have been putting the cart before the horse for so long, we are having a hard time making the transition to getting the horse to pull the cart. The idea of using a combination of systems of healing is something that has been going on in other parts of our planet for a very long time. It has been relatively difficult to develop this in the United States because of the devotion to technological medicine, and the viewpoint that only allopathic (conventional) medicine could answer all of our health and healing needs. I think that it is patently obvious at this point, that that dream has not come true, at least for the time being.

There is an eclectic model of wellness that has proven effectiveness and obvious advantages. Many advocates of self-care have promoted this model for nearly a century. It has been studied quite formally in the last decade specifically with reference to heart disease. This latter work is the result of the efforts of Dean Ornish and others,^[1, 2, 3] and it addresses the number one killer of people in the United States today, coronary heart disease. It has been my experience that this approach is also very effective in the treatment of a variety of other disorders as well. As well, it has supreme preventive benefits for those who do not suffer from any illness. If we can just begin to implement this type of system in the US on a broader basis, we can potentially save millions of lives and trillions of dollars and we will have a much healthier and happier society.

This model includes^[1]:

1. A low fat primarily plant-based diet (but rich in omega-3 fatty acids that can come from either flax or fish)
2. Regular participation in a rational program of aerobic exercise

3. Practice of a technique that induces the so called relaxation response (especially meditation)
4. Stretching (e.g. hatha yoga)
5. Group support (where one can express feelings and be supported without judgement or advice being offered)

Advantages of the wellness Model

1. Lower cost of health care.
2. Lower incidence of preventable disease.
3. Fewer complications from invasive therapies and drug therapies.
4. Less dependence on high levels of technology.

Disadvantages of the Wellness model:

1. Up front cost of retooling the system to educate and renovate the popular consciousness regarding the impact of lifestyle on health, and educate people to make rational lifestyle choices.
2. The need to bring about changes in corporate and economic structures that will support healthier lifestyles for the general population.
3. Loss of income to those that provide high cost invasive techniques.

With regard to this idea of wellness therapy, I would make a comment and prediction: The movement to wellness models has been slowly growing over the last 30 years, and will continue to unfold as an organic social process related to the evolution of human consciousness.

Risk Factors for Cardiovascular Disease

By now most of us are familiar with the risks that lead to the development of coronary heart disease and stroke, but it might be a good idea to review this now. Here they are:

1. Sex: Male gender has been an identified risk, but women have increasingly been victims of these illnesses due to changes in life style and other factors^[4].
2. Age: There is a positive correlation between advancing age and the development of cardiovascular diseases. In fact the disease can start as early as childhood^[5]
3. Lipids: Elevation of total cholesterol, LDL (low density lipoprotein, the so-called "bad" cholesterol), and triglycerides, and low HDL (high density lipoprotein, the so-called "good" cholesterol) are well known risks for stroke and heart disease and are among the most alterable risks^[6].
4. Smoking: This is a very big factor in the development of cardiovascular disease and a very costly life style choice for other reasons as well^[7].
5. Family history: Although genetic predisposition is an extremely important risk factor and certainly one that should be identified, it is not altogether unalterable^[8].
6. Weight: This is, of course, one of the seemingly most alterable risk factors, but can be one of the most difficult with which to achieve success^[9, 10].
7. Activity level: A sedentary lifestyle is easily the most approachable risk, but finding the right exercise is an entirely individual process^[11, 12].
8. Hypertension: High blood pressure is a risk that can be approached with a variety of therapies^[13, 14, 15].
9. Diabetes: As one of the most devastating and cardiovascular disease

accelerating risk factors, this deserves special attention [13, 16, 17].

10. CRP (C-reactive protein): This is a relatively newly identified risk factor for cardiovascular disease, and is especially important in women. It is really a nonspecific measurement of inflammation in the body, and not per se, a specific marker for cardiovascular risk, however taken in the correct clinical context, it can be a useful tool pointing toward a need for treatment and potentially for further evaluation or testing [18].

11. Homocysteine: As a result of metabolism of sulfur containing amino acids (a very common metabolic process in all living organisms), this substance is produced, and if it is not further handled by the body, it can accumulate. Elevation of homocysteine levels in the blood may be an indirect marker for risk or could be a direct risk, leading to acceleration of obstruction of arteries, but that is still being sorted out. For now, there are specific recommendations for the alteration of this finding in the blood. Homocysteine metabolism is directly related to several of the B vitamins [19, 20].

12. Attitude: The psychological (mental/emotional) health is also an important risk in the development of arterial diseases. Multiple studies have confirmed the importance of personality responses to stress in the development of these diseases, and value of stress management in preventing cardiovascular problems [21].

13. Thyroid disease: An oft-overlooked risk for heart disease and stroke are disorders of thyroid hormone production. Both low and high levels of this important hormone are implicated in the development of cardiovascular disease [22].

14. Chlamydia infection: Many persons with atherosclerotic arterial disease (hardening of the arteries) have been found to have plaques in the arteries that harbor an infection with *Chlamydia pneumoniae*, an organism that usually causes pneumonia. Unfortunately this small bacteria can live in a near dormant stage within cells of the body much like certain viruses (like the herpes family of viruses), and may be an important factor in the development of a variety of degenerative and autoimmune diseases. In addition, there may be other bacteria involved in this process, such as the newly identified nanobacteria [23, 24, 25].

15. Reduced heart rate variability: This is another generally undiscussed but well documented risk for adverse cardiovascular events. A person whose minute to minute heart rate does not have a good variability in rate has a much higher risk for these problems [26].

Reduction and/or Elimination of Risk

The general approach to reduction of risk for cardiovascular disease that I have been recommending to people for many years is largely a lifestyle management strategy, with the exception of the use of medicines and nutrients as supplements. I was not surprised when the Ornish studies were published backing the lifestyle approach completely. In fact, this approach is applicable to the prevention and treatment of most any degenerative or even autoimmune disease process. This approach is additionally based on an understanding that there is an innate healing or rectifying nature of all living systems and includes the right amounts of:

1. Clean air
2. Pure water
3. Healthy food
4. Stretching
5. Movement
6. Aerobic exercise
7. Correct nutrient supplements
8. Medicines: conventional and unconventional
9. Social support
10. Community service
11. Global awareness and interconnectedness
12. Spiritual practice

Let's just add a few words about some of these that are fairly intuitive to most of us, and a little more in depth information about those that are not.

Clean air is the number one necessity for healthy life on planet Earth, and it is in our best interest for all of us to remain vigilant in protecting this most vital planetary resource! The same goes for pure water. There are a variety of good water filter products on the market that can be purchased for use in the home. We generally recommend imbibing in at least 64 ounces (the proverbial "8 glasses") a day for most adults.

Diet is perhaps one of the more controversial topics on our list. Given the specific individual variation in dietary responses, needs and sensitivities, it would be impossible to address everyone's particular situation in an article such as this. In later articles, we promise to address some of these issues in greater depth. That being said, I will make some general statement about the diet that we usually recommend.

Most people should eat an organic food diet that consists primarily of a very wide variety of fresh vegetables, some fruits in season, some nuts (especially almonds, walnuts and Brazil nuts), seeds (especially fresh ground flax, and some sunflower and sesame seeds) whole grains, one or two servings of whole non-GMO soy products daily, and for those that are inclined to eat animal products, we recommend primarily fresh non-ranched or organic ranched salmon and halibut (sardines are great for those who like them) , and some organically raised free-range poultry products. We strongly recommend avoidance of refined and processed foods and sugar as much as possible. Good sugar substitutes include stevia, fructo-oligo saccharides (FOS) and sucralose. Extra virgin olive oil should be the primary fat source, and raw is preferred rather than cooked. Now that's a mouthful, but still quite lean when it comes to the discussion of diet! As I mentioned, we will have much more to say as new articles are posted.

Daily stretching of the body is something that many people overlook. It is a proven and easy thing to do. Most of us are aware of how often animal stretch on a regular basis. It is a natural thing to do. In our busy modern lives we just have unlearned this very healthy process. One of my favorite methods of stretching is Hatha yoga. Another excellent form is called Nomadics. My other favorite stretching program comes from a great book written by Bob Anderson back in the 1970's. It is called simply: Stretching (www.stretching.com). One of these should

be just right for you and it is easy to learn. One should stretch for at least 10 minutes twice a day.

Another healthy habit is a daily movement program. This can be incorporated into the daily stretching and exercise regimen. Although stretching alone provides terrific benefits to the body's internal organs through stimulation of detoxification and circulation and oxygenation, the benefits of a movement program will greatly enhance those benefits. My favorite movement program is Qigong. Specifically Chi Lel Qigong, which we refer to as "medical qigong." This ancient Chinese art and practice is the mother of all movement disciplines including Tai Chi and all of the martial arts. A daily ritual of one of these types of programs would be extremely beneficial in preventing and treating cardiovascular disease^[7].

I think that all of us are familiar with the published benefits of aerobic exercise on health in general, and on cardiovascular health in particular. By far the best exercise is walking, but we like people to perform a variety of aerobic practices, mixing it up so that they do not become bored with exercising. Just do what you enjoy the most. There are a huge number of options these days. Obviously, some people will have certain health limitations and may need a specific form of exercise to fit their individual situation. We always recommend discussing this with your healthcare practitioner, so you can make sure that what you plan is safe for you to do. One misconception that I wanted to clear up has to do with weight training. Many people believe that you can not derive an aerobic benefit from weight training, but that is just not true. Just make sure that you check with your healthcare provider so that you can be sure that weight training is safe for you and, if you have no experience with this, make sure you get instruction from a knowledgeable trainer.

Specific nutritional supplements have been shown to have some propensity towards decreasing the risks of cardiovascular disease. The evidence is sufficient to recommend their regular use^[28]. Let's review some of these important supplements and the usual doses recommended. In general these are taken with food except where indicated. All nutritional supplements should be treated as medicines and one should always discuss the use of these with a qualified health care provider. Note: This listing is very general and some of these nutrients or herbs have multiple applications and benefits (for example American Ginseng not only lowers blood pressure, but can also lower blood sugar).

These should be considered for those at risk for cardiovascular diseases:

- Omega 3 fatty acids as fish oil or flax, two to six grams each day^[29,30, 31].
- Coenzyme Q10 (especially if on beta-blockers, or statin drugs) 100 to 300 mg each day^[32, 33].
- Grape seed and skin extract 100 mg twice a day^[34, 35, 36].
- Vitamin B12 1000 mcg each day^[37, 38].
- B6 100 mg each day^[39].
- Folic acid 800 to 1600 mcg each day^[40].
- Vitamin C, whole food products 1,000 to 2000 mg each day^[41, 42].
- Vitamin E 400 to 1000 iu each day^[43].

In addition, these should be considered for those with proven disease:

- Hawthorn extract 1500 mg two or three times a day with water [44, 45].
- L-Carnitine 500 mg, two twice a day with water [46, 47, 48, 49, 50].

These should be considered by those with glucose metabolism problems:

- Chromium GTF 200 mcg 3 times each day [51, 52, 53].
- Vanadium (as vanadyl sulfate) 1 mg each day [51, 53, 54].
- Alpha lipoic acid 400 once or twice each day [55].

These are some alternative options for support of normal cholesterol and triglyceride levels:

- Inositol Hexaniacinate (no flush and liver safe niacin) 500 to 3000 mg a day [56].
- Guggul lipid 500 to 300 mg a day [57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63].
- Policosanol 10 to 80 mg a day [64].

These should be considered for those with elevated blood pressure:

- Potassium 99 mg twice a day.
- Calcium/magnesium aspartate 1000/1000 to 1500/1500 mg a day.

These herbs can also be used to support normal blood pressure and can be used singly or in combination. This is not an exhaustive list and we will go into more depth about healthy blood pressure in another article.

- Forskolin 100 mg twice a day with water [65, 66, 67, 68].
- Ashwagandha 300 mg three times a day with water [69].
- American Ginseng 500 mg three times a day with water [70].
- Astragalus 500 mg three times a day with water [71, 72, 73].

Multiple studies have been done looking at the value of good social support in the promotion of health [74, 75, 76, 77]. The definition of this for us is one or more persons that may or may not share the same diagnosis, with which one shares one's feelings and thoughts (note I do not say thoughts only), and whom is willing to listen and provide emotional support without judging or giving advice.

There is also great benefit to individual health through participation in the community and through a sense of connectedness on a global level. By fostering good relationships and creating harmonious energy, the immune system and cardiovascular response mechanisms are strengthened and regulated in normal parameters [78, 79].

Finally, good studies have now shown that some kind of daily personal, individual spiritual practice aids significantly in the prevention of cardiovascular disease and reduction of the risk of adverse cardiovascular events. It appears that, based on the data currently available, any kind of reverent practice, whether religious or not will suffice [80, 81, 82].

In summary, cardiovascular diseases are the number one killers of people in the United States. There are a variety of conventional treatments available that are invasive and/or are associated with some risks. These therapies are absolutely life saving and necessary in many persons with cardiovascular diseases.

However, there are also a variety of alternative therapies and strategies that can be used in health promotion, disease prevention, and disease regression. These may be used by themselves or in conjunction with conventional treatments. A qualified healthcare provider should always be consulted when using any type of

active therapy for cardiovascular disease. In this respect, a good partnership is always a healthier path than trying to go it alone

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