

Heart disease: Looming epidemic?

What you need to know about prevention and treatment

It seems like we all know of someone who has died from heart disease. In fact, it is the #1 killer in America, affecting one in three of us, and its vicious prevalence is rising at a rapid pace.

Heart disease, otherwise known as Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) and Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), refers to a disease of the arteries—the vessels that feed blood (carrying oxygen) to the organs, and in particular, to heart muscle. Anything that blocks the blood flow of these critical vessels causes a heart attack. And if the artery block is in the brain, a stroke. Most would choose a heart attack over a stroke, but we can avoid both!

How does it really happen? A plaque that thickens the artery walls results primarily from accumulated small droplets of fatty acid or a nest of multiplying oral bacteria. But it is inflammation that allows each of these to penetrate in the first place. In a state of inflammation, all the body's artery linings become damaged and as a result, much more permeable

to small dense cholesterol droplets or migrating bacteria. Narrowing of vessels from plaque generally does not create the cardiovascular incident—it's when plaque ruptures, like a pimple that pops, into the lumen (center) of the vessel. Like the pimple, the rupture triggers the rapid formation of a blood clot.

We might think CVD is a genetic condition—one we inherit by chance. It can make you feel as though you are a ticking time bomb, passively awaiting the explosion. Turns out, an unhealthy lifestyle trumps genetics by a longshot. Countless studies suggest that even if we come from an ill-fated gene pool, lifestyle is a light switch that either turns the tendency on...or keeps it turned off.

What are the lifestyle issues that prompt systemic inflammation and activate CVD? Obesity, periodontal disease, diet, sleep disorders, diabetes, smoking, pharmaceuticals and hypertension, are significant examples. There are many ways to reverse these sources

of inflammation. There are also clinical markers to help you assess your risk and even detect early disease. It's easy to test for blood markers that measure inflammation, blood sugar and advanced lipid profile. Periodontal disease screening and blood pressure monitoring are other important assessments. We can even measure the thickness of your artery walls by using neck vessels as indicators.

So, don't wait for a major event to be diagnosed with CVD! Learn everything you can to detect early disease and turn it around. If you suspect you are already a candidate for heart disease, seek a thorough examination.



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