

FEBRUARY 2015

EPIC WELLNEWS

WHAT IS HEART DISEASE?

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Heart disease, the number one killer in the United States, includes a number of health problems that reduce the ability of the heart and/or blood vessels to work properly.

All kinds of heart disease all have one thing in common: they disrupt the heart from doing its job as efficiently as possible. Some types of heart disease are congenital and cannot be prevented; many others are preventable and even reversible (or at least treatable) through medical and lifestyle interventions.

MAJOR TYPES OF HEART DISEASE

Coronary artery disease (CAD), the most common type of heart disease, is the leading cause of heart attacks. With CAD, arteries become hard and narrow (a condition known as atherosclerosis) due to a buildup of cholesterol and fat (known as plaque) inside the arteries.

Blood has a hard time getting to the heart. Without adequate blood flow, the heart becomes starved of oxygen and vital nutrients. CAD can lead to angina, chest pain or discomfort that happens when the heart does not get enough blood.

A heart attack occurs when an artery is severely or completely blocked, and the heart does not get the blood it needs for more than 20 minutes. A heart attack is a life threatening emergency that can result in death, so it's important to understand the signs and symptoms of a heart attack.

Heart failure occurs when the heart is not able to pump blood through the body as well as it should. Other organs do not get enough blood. This can result in shortness of breath, swelling in the feet, ankles and legs, and extreme tiredness.

Heart arrhythmia (or dysrhythmia) is a change or abnormality in the beat of the heart. The heart beats erratically, too slowly, or too fast. Most people have experienced arrhythmia like this at some time, and these occasional changes in heartbeat—often brought on by adrenaline surges or intense emotional response—are often harmless. If your heart flutters and other symptoms such as dizziness or shortness of breath occur, call 911 right away.

Stroke occurs when part of the brain doesn't get enough blood due to a clot (known as an ischemic stroke) or a burst blood vessel (a hemorrhagic stroke). If blood flow is stopped for longer than a few seconds, brain cells can die, resulting in permanent damage to the brain.

Vascular disease (blood vessel disease) is any condition that affects the circulatory system (arteries and blood vessels). Peripheral vascular disease occurs when blood vessels outside of the heart develop atherosclerosis, narrowing the arteries and resulting in inadequate blood flow to the body's tissues.

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Other types of cardiovascular disease include aneurysms, blood clots, heart valve disease, congenital heart disease, and enlarged heart.

Because heart disease is the leading cause of death in America, it's important to learn how you can strengthen your heart and prevent heart disease through a variety of healthy lifestyle habits. Even people who already have heart disease can live long and healthy lives by incorporating many of the same heart-healthy habits and following the medical plan prescribed by their doctor.

PLANT STEROLS AND STANOLS: THE BASICS

Plant sterols and plant stanols are phytoosterols (small but essential components of certain plant membranes). They are found naturally in some vegetable oils, nuts, grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables. Research has shown that plant sterols and plant stanols have the ability to help lower cholesterol.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

When you eat food that contains dietary cholesterol (which is found in animal products like meat, eggs and dairy), your intestinal tract absorbs that cholesterol and puts it into the bloodstream. Plant sterols and plant stanols are chemically similar to dietary cholesterol found in animal products. So when the sterols and stanols travel through your digestive tract, they get in the way of dietary cholesterol, preventing it from being absorbed into the bloodstream. Therefore, less total cholesterol is absorbed by your body when plant sterols and stanols are present. The cholesterol that is not absorbed leaves the body as waste.

Because of the proven efficacy of sterols and stanols, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved a health claim for these substances, which are naturally found in many plants and are added to some processed foods.

HEART DISEASE TYPES

http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/wellness_articles.asp?id=1608

PLANT STEROLS AND STANOLS

http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/nutrition_articles.asp?id=1180