



Health & Safety Alert #24-1-04

Heart Disease

Heart Disease Leading Cause of Death for all Americans

Heart Disease is the leading cause of death in the general population, as well as, with individuals with MRDD. "Heart disease" includes arteriosclerotic cardiovascular heart disease (ASHD, ASCVD), heart attack (myocardial infarction, MI), hypertension (HCVD), heart failure (CHF), congenital, rheumatic or valvular heart disease, arrhythmias, or cardiomyopathy. "Strokes" result from an interruption of the blood flow to the brain (cerebrovascular accident, CVA) and can also be a sign of heart disease.

Risk factors for heart disease include:

Age
Family history
Gender

Smoking
Obesity
Physical inactivity

Diabetes
High cholesterol
High blood pressure

Several congenital syndromes such as Down Syndrome, Marfan Syndrome, and Prater-Willi Syndrome have a much higher risk of cardiac disease.

Risk factors for heart disease fall into two categories – those you can change, and those you cannot. You cannot control your family history, age or gender; however, there are things that can be done to prevent and/or control other risk factors.

Healthy eating habits, exercise and weight control are extremely important. Low fat, low cholesterol foods are heart healthy. The diet should emphasize lean meats, baked, roasted or grilled chicken (skinless) and fish, and multiple daily servings of fruits and vegetables. To promote heart health, also limit fatty, fried foods, salt, caffeine and calories.

Other ways to promote heart health:

- STOP smoking!
- Exercise regularly.
- Control cholesterol with medication if diet/exercise are not effective.
- Diabetics need to maintain blood sugar levels and be monitored closely for control.
- Normalize blood pressure through diet/exercise and/or medication.
- Good dental hygiene – gum disease and abscesses can lead to infections in the heart and blood.
- Stress management.
- Limit alcohol intake.

Symptoms of stroke include:

- Slurred speech.
- Weakness, numbness or paralysis (unable to use) of one side of body or face.
- Drooping of one side of face.
- New onset weakness in a hand, arm or leg.
- Severe headache.
- Change in level of alertness.
- Vision change.

Remember – heart disease can occur in all people of all ages. Physician examinations should be maintained for all individuals, but be done more frequently and with specific attention to cardiac health in those with any of the above risk factors.

Stay alert for symptoms such as:

- Unexplained fatigue.
- Shortness of breath.
- Abnormal skin pallor or bluish colored skin.
- Decrease in appetite or difficulty in swallowing.
- Agitation, which may be coming from chest pain (angina) or anxiety associated with the unpleasant inner sensation of cardiac rhythm changes.

Important: Don't wait! Seek immediate medical attention when signs and symptoms are present!

For questions or comments regarding the above Alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

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