
Heart Disease

What is Heart Disease?

Heart disease occurs when the arterial walls become lined with fatty deposits (plaques) and narrow. The body tries to compensate. In order to get the same amount of blood around the body as it did when the arteries were free, it needs to increase the blood pressure.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in New Zealand

With increased pressure, it becomes more likely that one of the plaques breaks off and is carried along with the blood flow. However, arteries become smaller as they approach the extremities, the brain or the heart muscle. It is there that a plaque can block an artery. The area of the body that is usually supplied with oxygen by this artery gets cut off and dies. In the brain it is called a stroke or cerebro-vascular accident, and in the heart muscle it is called a heart attack or myocardial infarction.

Risk factors

- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure (a normal blood pressure is around 120 over 80)
- Alcohol
- Diabetes
- Overweight
- Diets high in salt, sugar and saturated fats
- Lack of exercise
- Stress
- Smoking

Cholesterol

A certain amount of cholesterol is required for good health but when there is an excessive amount of cholesterol in the blood, it is deposited in the artery walls causing narrowing and hardening of the arteries. This increases the risk of heart disease.

Cholesterol comes from animal products and is made naturally in our own bodies. There is no cholesterol in plant products.

There are 2 types of cholesterol. Good and bad. Cholesterol is carried in protein molecules called lipoproteins. High density lipoproteins HDL is often called good cholesterol because it removes cholesterol from the artery walls. Low density lipoproteins LDL is often called bad cholesterol because it deposits cholesterol in artery walls.

To lower cholesterol you should:

- Eat less fats
- Eat more fruit and vegetables, cereals and breads
- Aim for a healthy body weight
- Limit salt, sugar and alcohol.

Blood pressure

A normal blood pressure is often quoted at about 120 over 80. When the heart contracts the blood is forced out at 120 and when the heart relaxes the pressure falls to 80.

High blood pressure also called hypertension means the blood pressure is always above the normal range. High blood pressure often runs in families.

Prevention:

- Maintain a normal weight
- Exercise regularly
- Eat less salt
- Stop smoking
- Decrease amount of alcohol consumed

Reducing Risks

Heart disease as a result of high 'cholesterol' and/or high blood pressure is a 'silent' disease, you don't have symptoms until it is too late. It is therefore important to have your blood pressure and lipids checked by a doctor every now and then. This is particularly important if there is heart disease, high blood pressure (hypertension) or high 'cholesterol' (hyperlipidaemia) in your family.

Diet

Our diet should be high in fruit and vegetables (to protect LDL from getting oxidized and becoming more sticky), whole grains (fibre acts like a 'broom' in arteries) and fish (steamed or baked), and low in animal fats, salt (hardens arteries and thus adds to high blood pressure) and sugar. Including seeds and

nuts in the diet is advantageous as it raises HDL. Salad dressings should be made with cold pressed oils (safflower, canola, olive) which are obtainable in a health food shop or in the health food section of supermarkets.

*HDL cholesterol
protects against heart
disease.*

Smoking

Smoking constricts arteries and therefore adds to the narrowing effect. It also oxidizes the LDL and makes it more sticky increasing the formation of plaques.

Stress

Relax or exercise. Exercise not only reduces stress and makes you feel good, it also improves circulation, regulates blood pressure and reduces weight. Carers are more prone to heart disease than many others due to the high stress load they carry.

Medication

Drugs may control high blood pressure but they do not cure it. Usually the medication is taken long term. Regular check ups are essential to monitor your blood pressure.

Other drugs can interfere with blood pressure management. Oral contraceptives, liquorice, steroids and anti depressants may increase blood pressure.

Where to go for Support

Heart Foundation

Heart disease is New Zealand's leading cause of death. The Heart Foundation aims to reduce the number of people that die from heart and blood vessel disease each year. They provide resources such as pamphlets, videos and recipe books. They also support the many Cardiac Clubs around New Zealand. Cardiac Clubs provide the opportunity for heart patients to get together socially, to take part in physical activity and to hear speakers on a range of heart related topics.

For more information phone 09 524 6005

Caring for Carers

Joining a carer support group can relieve some of the stress you are under as a carer. The constant tasks, the concerns, grief, drama, moments of joy, frustration and exhaustion are all part of the day to day existence of a carer.

Feelings of helplessness, fear, anger, guilt and despair are all normal. It is important that the carer has an outlet for these feelings, like having someone to talk to. The chance to share with others who understand and are also, or have been carers lightens the load and may be all that is needed. *Caring for Carers* provides support to carers by providing a way to communicate feelings that it would not be appropriate to discuss with friends, family or the caree.

Caring for Carers has a Newsletter and several support meetings each month and ongoing telephone support. These services are provided to help make your job easier.

Caring for Carers is situated:

4th floor, Securities House
221 Gloucester Street, Christchurch.
Postal address: P O Box 13 167, Christchurch
Phone: 377 8426
Fax: 377 8420
Email: caringforcarers@xtra.co.nz