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Nurture Your Cardiovascular Health

The cardiovascular system consists of the heart and blood vessels and is responsible for carrying nutrients and oxygen to the tissues and removing carbon dioxide and other waste from them. Diseases affecting the cardiovascular system include arteriosclerosis, coronary artery disease, heart valve disease, arrhythmia, heart failure, hypertension, orthostatic hypotension, shock, endocarditis, diseases of the aorta and its branches, disorders of the peripheral vascular system, and congenital heart disease. February is the American Heart Association's Heart Health Awareness Month, emphasizing the importance of cardiovascular health and the dangers of cardiovascular disease.



Cardiovascular disease is the leading health threat with heart disease and stroke topping the list of the first and second leading causes of death worldwide. One out of every two men and one out of every three women will develop heart disease sometime in their life. Despite dramatic medical advances over the past fifty years, heart disease remains a leading cause of death globally and the number one cause of death in the United States. Cardiovascular disease is not just a man's disease, in women, the condition is responsible for about 29% of deaths, reports the CDC. Although more men die of heart disease than women, females tend to be under diagnosed, often to the point that it's too late to help them once the condition is discovered.

By integrating acupuncture and Oriental medicine into your heart healthy lifestyle, you can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease by as much as 80%. Steps to prevention include managing high blood pressure and cholesterol, quitting smoking, eating healthy, maintaining a healthy weight, physical activity, reducing stress and improved sleep - all of which can be helped with acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

5 Steps to a Healthy Heart with Acupuncture

1. Manage High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure makes the heart work harder, increasing its oxygen demands and contributing to angina. This excessive pressure can lead to an enlarged heart (cardiomegaly), as well as damage to blood vessels in the kidneys and brain. It increases the risk of heart attacks, stroke and kidney disease.

Acupuncture has been found to be particularly helpful in lowering blood pressure. By applying acupuncture needles at specific sites along the wrist, inside the forearm or in the leg, researchers at the Susan Samueli Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, Irvine, were able to stimulate the release of opioids, which decreases the heart's activity and thus its need for oxygen. This, in turn, lowers blood pressure.

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Heart Healthy



Having a healthy diet is one of the best ways to support your cardiovascular health and prevent heart disease.

Here are some suggested foods which will support your heart healthy lifestyle:

Cruciferous Vegetables

Cruciferous vegetables such as kale, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, radish, turnips, and cabbages are a gold mine of antioxidants and other heart-saving phytochemicals. Make sure that cruciferous vegetables are part of your heart health diet every day.

2. Quit Smoking

Most people associate cigarette smoking with breathing problems and lung cancer. But did you know that smoking is also a major cause of coronary artery disease? In fact, about 20% of all deaths from heart disease are directly related to cigarette smoking.

Acupuncture has shown to be an effective treatment for smoking. Acupuncture treatments for smoking cessation focus on jitters, cravings, irritability, and restlessness - symptoms that people commonly complain about when they quit. It also aids in relaxation and detoxification.

3. Maintain a Healthy Weight

Obesity is associated with diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary artery disease, all of which increase the risk of developing heart disease, but studies have shown that excess body weight itself (and not just the associated medical conditions) can also lead to heart failure. Even if you are entirely healthy otherwise, being overweight still places you at a greater risk of developing heart failure.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine are an excellent adjunctive tool when it comes to losing weight. They can help to energize the body, maximize the absorption of nutrients, regulate elimination, control overeating, suppress the appetite, and reduce anxiety.

4. Reduce Stress

Stress is a normal part of life, but if left unmanaged, stress can lead to emotional, psychological, and even physical problems, including heart disease, high blood pressure, chest pains, or irregular heart beats. Medical researchers aren't exactly sure how stress increases the risk of heart disease. Stress itself might be a risk factor, or it could be that high levels of stress make other risk factors worse. For example, if you are under stress, your blood pressure goes up, you may overeat, you may exercise less, and you may be more likely to smoke.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the substantial benefits of acupuncture in the treatment of stress, anxiety and mental health. In addition to acupuncture, Oriental medicine offers a whole gamut of tools and techniques that can be integrated into your life to keep stress in check. These tools include Tui Na, Qi Gong exercises, herbal medicine, dietary therapy, meditations and acupressure that you can administer at home.

5. Improve Sleep

Poor sleep has been linked with high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, heart failure, heart attacks, stroke, diabetes, and obesity. Researchers have shown that getting at least eight hours of sleep is needed for good heart health and getting less than eight hours of sleep can put you at a greater risk for developing heart disease.

Acupuncture has shown great success treating a wide array of sleep problems without any of the side effects of prescription or over-the-counter sleep aids. The acupuncture treatments for problems sleeping focus on the root disharmony within the body that is causing the insomnia. Therefore, those who use acupuncture for insomnia achieve not only better sleep, but also an overall improvement of physical and mental health.

Come in for a consultation during Heart Health Awareness Month to see how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can assist you with your heart health and help you to live a long, healthy life.

Fish

Fatty fish such as salmon and anchovies are loaded with the omega-3 fatty acids that will help your heart maintain a steady rhythm. Having a serving of fish a week could reduce your risk of death from a heart attack by 52%.

Flaxseed

Flaxseed is one of the most potent sources of heart health-promoting omega-3 fats. Studies indicate that adding flaxseed to your diet can reduce the development of heart disease by 46% while helping keep red blood cells from clumping together and forming clots that can block arteries. Sprinkle 2 Tbsp of flax-seed a day on your cereal or salad.

Fruit

Oranges contain folic acid that helps lower levels of homocysteine, a heart attack risk factor.

Grapes are loaded with flavonoids and resveratrol, both potent antioxidants that may discourage red blood cells from clumping together and forming an artery-blocking clot.

Pomegranates are chock-full of potassium and polyphenols, which promote heart health and have been shown to help lower cholesterol. The latest studies are showing that the juice limits the genetic tendency toward hardening of the arteries.

Acupuncture for Cholesterol Management

It's important to have your blood cholesterol levels checked since you can have high cholesterol and not realize it. Most of the 65 million Americans with high cholesterol have no symptoms. All adults age 20 and older should have their cholesterol levels checked at least once every five years. If you have elevated cholesterol, you'll need to have it tested more often.

Research has clearly shown that lowering cholesterol can reduce the risk of developing heart disease. Whether you have heart disease already or want to prevent it, you can reduce your risk for having a heart attack by lowering your cholesterol level.

According to the American Heart Association, exercise and a healthy balanced diet low in cholesterol and saturated fats is important to lowering risk and improving your cardiovascular health. Speak to your health care providers to make sure your cholesterol is being monitored and find out how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you stay healthy.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be used to treat many of the health conditions known to drastically increase the risk of heart disease and high cholesterol including smoking, high blood pressure, excess weight, and diabetes.

Excess weight tends to increase your low density lipoprotein (LDL) levels, raise triglycerides, a fatty substance in the blood and in food, and lowers your high density lipoprotein (HDL) levels. Regular physical activity can help you lose weight and raise HDL, lower triglycerides, and lower LDL.

Call today to see how Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you with your cholesterol management goals!

Going Against The Grain: The Dangers of Wheat

The notion of eating grains is central to human civilization. We "break bread" with friends and family. In the Bible, Moses describes the Promised Land as a "land of wheat and barley and vineyards". Christians consume wafers of wheat that represent the body of Christ. Muslims revere bread as sacred. So what could be wrong with eating wheat? As it turns out, plenty.

Decades of selective breeding and hybridization by the food industry to increase crop yields and confer certain aesthetic characteristics on flour have created new proteins and carbohydrates in wheat that the human body was not designed to handle.

There is a complex carbohydrate unique to wheat called amylopectin-A. It is very quickly digested in the stomach, and raises blood sugar levels quickly; more quickly than even sugar! The raised blood sugar sets off a cascade of reactions in the body that leads to higher insulin and glucose levels, which leads to higher fat storage, which leads to higher estrogen and inflammation levels. Which all can lead to weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, and on and on. Amylopectin-A also strongly stimulates appetite.

Besides amylopectin-A, wheat contains gluten, a protein also found in rye barley, spelt, kamut, and oats. Gluten is hidden in pizza, pasta, bread, rolls, crackers, and most processed foods. The gluten protein in modern wheat is different in structure from the gluten in wheat that our ancestors ate. And American strains of wheat have a much higher gluten content than those traditionally found in Europe. Gluten can cause serious health problems for people, even those who don't have celiac disease.

Garlic

Just one clove a day, or 300 mg three times daily, reduces the risk of heart attack at least three ways: It discourages red blood cells from sticking together and blocking your arteries, it reduces arterial damage, and it discourages cholesterol from lining the arteries and making them so narrow that blockages are likely.

Green Tea

Green tea contains several powerful antioxidants that reduce bad cholesterol and boost good cholesterol, improving an individual's overall cholesterol profile. Drinking green tea also seems to enhance cardiovascular health by improving the consistency of platelets in the blood and may even lower blood pressure.

Nuts

Studies have found that those who eat more than 5 oz of nuts a week are one-third less likely to have either heart disease or a heart attack. Just don't overdo it as nuts can pile on the pounds.

Red Wine

Scientific studies overwhelmingly show that a daily glass of wine can reduce your risk of a heart attack. Both plant compounds called saponins and antioxidants in the "fruit of the vine" work to protect arteries. Researchers have found that red is much more effective than white for improving heart health.

A review paper in the New England Journal of Medicine listed 55 diseases that can be caused by eating gluten! These include osteoporosis, stomach and bowel disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, MS, anemia, schizophrenia, neuropathy, epilepsy, diabetes, and heart disease. When researchers at the Mayo Clinic and the University of Iowa put 215 celiac disease patients on a wheat-free diet, the obese patients lost an average of 30 pounds in just six months.

The gliadin in wheat, another protein, also strongly stimulates the appetite. When people stop eating wheat and are no longer exposed to so much gliadin, gluten, and amelopectin-A, they typically consume about 400 calories less per day.

Another component of wheat, and other grains, are lectins. Lectins are glycoproteins that are present in all foods to a varying degree. Lectins are a plant's defense mechanism against insects, fungus, and bacteria. The lectins in modern wheat however are unique. After thousands of years of hybridization and selective breeding for higher protein concentration, the proportion of wheat lectins have increased as well.

The chemical bonds in wheat lectins are formed in the same way as vulcanized rubber and human hair, making the bonds strong and durable and resistant to being broken down during digestion. As a result, the undigested proteins tend to accumulate in the body. This causes damage to cells and tissues throughout the body, and can lead to disruptions in the immune, circulatory, endocrine, and nervous systems.

It is not a coincidence that the rise in Type 2 diabetes, affecting 25-30 million Americans, parallels the increased consumption of modern wheat. Wheat is certainly not the only factor in this epidemic increase, but it is a major factor. The surge in blood sugar and insulin your body gets after eating wheat, ultimately leads to increased fat stores, especially visceral fat, which causes the body to be more insulin resistant and increases the risk of diabetes, and many other ailments.

A wheat-rich diet is also linked to osteoporosis and osteopenia. Wheat encourages our body's internal environment to be more acidic, a condition known as acidosis. To counteract acidosis, we leach calcium from our bones in an attempt to normalize the blood's PH.

A diet rich in wheat and other grains and carbohydrates causes an increase in small, dense LDL particles, the type of cholesterol most closely associated with heart disease. Studies at the University of California at Berkeley found that the concentration of small LDL particles increases dramatically with a high-wheat diet.

So what should you eat if you are trying to avoid wheat and other gluten-containing grains? Most grocery stores now carry a few non-gluten grains such as millet, quinoa, buckwheat, and amaranth. These don't have gluten and the other triggers to weight gain, inflammation, and insulin resistance.

Rice is a good choice for some, although it also raises blood sugar levels quickly. Be careful with all the gluten-free products out there. Gluten-free has become a big industry, and while there are a few good products, most manufacturers use substitutes like rice bran, tapioca and corn starch. These all elevate blood sugar and insulin levels quickly, so you end up in the same boat.

To you good health,

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