

An Insight on Heart Disease



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According to the American Heart Association, 1 in 4 people dies of heart disease. Millions of people are managing one or more types of cardiovascular disease. The GOOD NEWS is that 80% of heart disease can be prevented.

How do you know if you have heart disease? According to Dr. Needleman, the most common manifestation of heart disease is angina, which is generally described as a crushing, squeezing, pressure-like ("someone sitting on my chest") deep chest pain which may radiate to the arm, neck or back. It is caused by reduced blood flow to the heart and specifically related to lack of oxygen, which the heart needs in order to function and pump blood properly. When the heart can't function properly, the body won't function properly either- which leads to symptoms like nausea, indiges

tion or shortness of breath. Sometimes these are the only symptoms that may be felt, which is why heart disease is often referred to as a "silent killer." If these signs are recognized early on, the disease may be treated effectively.

Some also have different presentations of chest pain. Namely, diabetics have alterations in nerve function and are not able to feel the chest pain. Women and elderly patients may also have different presenting symptoms. The elderly, for instance, are more likely to feel tired, have a lack of energy and be confused with the onset of a heart attack.

In many cases, patients have not realized that they are living with indicators related to a damaged heart. Dizziness, heart palpitations, swol

len legs, coughing while laying down and shortness of breath are signs that should lead you straight to the doctor to get it checked out. Dr. Needleman states, "an important group not to be overlooked is people with peripheral vascular disease, usually manifest as pain or weakness in the legs with walking, who may have heart disease that is asymptomatic. One last point is that sometimes coronary artery disease can be discovered at a very early stage by utilizing a CT scan to measure a coronary calcium score. Calcium is an indication of plaque buildup in the arteries."

It is important to take some ownership of your own body by understanding the symptoms and understanding the disease more clearly, especially if you have a family history of heart disease. There are also several heart conditions and some that can lead to a stroke. Various conditions are listed below, some with a brief description:

"It is important to take some ownership of your own body..."



- ♥ **ARRHYTHMIA:**
Irregular heartbeats (certain need treatment, others don't)
- ♥ **CARDIAC REHAB**
- ♥ **CONGENITAL HEART DEFECTS**
- ♥ **CARDIAC ARREST:**
A sudden loss of heart function
- ♥ **CARDIOMYOPATHY IN ADULTS:**
Often goes unrecognized
- ♥ **CHOLESTEROL:**
Puts you at risk for heart disease
- ♥ **HEART FAILURE (HF):**
Heart isn't pumping enough blood
- ♥ **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE (HBP):**
Damages and scars arteries, having big consequences
- ♥ **PERICARDITIS:**
Membrane around the heart is inflamed
- ♥ **PERIPHERAL ARTERY DISEASE (PAD):**
Blood vessels of legs, arms or torso have plaque
- ♥ **VASCULAR HEALTH**
- ♥ **VENOUS THROMBOEMBOLISM (VTW):**
Blood clots forming in veins
- ♥ **HEART VALVE PROBLEMS AND DISEASE**
- ♥ **METABOLIC SYNDROME**
- ♥ **STROKE:**
When a blood vessel burst or is blocked

More information can be found on the American Heart Association's website, www.HEART.org

There are several things that can be done to prevent heart disease. They may be things you are familiar with and have been told, but it cannot be said enough—leading a healthy lifestyle is really the utmost important change you can make if you don't already.

Some screenings that are typically done include:

- **Carotid Artery Screening (Plaque):** this is an ultrasound of the carotid arteries to see if there is fatty plaque building up.
- **Peripheral Arterial Disease Screening:** this checks for peripheral arterial disease (plaque build-up) in the lower extremities using an ultrasound and blood pressure measurement
- **Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm:** using an ultrasound, one screen for an existing aneurysm (enlargement) in the abdominal aorta, which could lead to a ruptured aortic artery.
- **Heart Rhythm (atrial fibrillation):** EKG electrodes are placed on the arms and legs to identify the presence of an irregular heartbeat. Atrial Fibrillation increases the risk of stroke by five times.
- **Osteoporosis Risk Assessment:** the heel bone is screened to see if there is abnormal bone mass density.



It is crucial to have a good relationship with your doctor. Regular follow-ups are important to make sure that you have not developed any silent symptoms of heart disease.