



Tuesday, December 9, 2003

Maintain your heart for good health

By *Christine Hughes*, contributing writer

If you change the oil in your car every 3,000 miles and practice routine maintenance as recommended by your automaker, your engine will last a very long time. So why wouldn't you do the same with your heart?

The heart – the most important muscle in the body – often is abused and poorly maintained. More than 61 million Americans live with some form of heart disease, making it the leading cause of premature and permanent disability in the workforce. About 1 million Americans are hospitalized annually with some form of cardiovascular disease. Finally, more than 950,000 Americans die yearly – that's one death every 33 seconds – from heart disease.

Now for the good news.

The Center for Disease Control reports that heart disease is a "largely preventable condition" and it all gets back to maintenance.

"Two of the major independent risk factors for cardiovascular disease are high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. About 90 percent of middle-aged Americans will develop high blood pressure in their lifetime, and nearly 70 percent of people with high blood pressure do not have it under control," reports the CDC.

Embarking on a prevention program is the best medicine for addressing those issues and keeping your heart healthy. By controlling the risk factors that you can, you will lessen the power of the factors you can't such as age and family history.

Sometimes improvement of the variable risk factors requires a change in habit; other times a change in lifestyle. If you smoke, quit. If you overeat, stop. If you don't exercise, do. Discover that nutritious can be delicious and that with pain there is gain. High blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and diabetes are conditions that you, the holder of the key to your good health, must learn to control.

A complete physical and consultation with your personal physician are central to embarking on long-term maintenance of your heart. And, as in any prevention program, the benefits are both healthful and financial – it's less expensive to change the oil than it is to rebuild the engine.

Should a heart attack occur, the most important step to take is to get to the hospital. Half of the deaths that occur due to a heart attack occur within the first hour of experiencing symptoms. Such an alarming statistic prompted the American Heart Association to instigate an "Act in Time" awareness campaign that contains these simple pieces of advice: call 911 the minute you suspect a problem and know the warning signs – chest discomfort, discomfort that radiates into other areas of the upper body including the neck and jaw, shortness of breath, a cold sweat, nausea and lightheadedness.

Immediate treatment can not only save a life, it can improve the prognosis for recovery by preventing long-term damage to the heart.

For more information on what to do in case of a heart attack and the symptoms of a heart attack, read the "**Know the signs of cardiovascular disease**" story, which was the fifth article in this series.

This is the sixth article in a series on health-related issues. By being an informed health-care consumer, OU employees can help contain and reduce benefit costs to the university. Next week's article is about smoking, the benefits of quitting and how to quit.

SUMMARY

The heart – the most important muscle in the body – often is abused and poorly maintained. More than 61 million Americans live with some form of heart disease, making it the leading cause of premature and permanent disability in the workforce. However, the Center for Disease Control reports that heart disease is a "largely preventable condition" and it all gets back to maintenance.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, December 9, 2003
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, December 9, 2003
Article Start Date: Wednesday, December 10, 2003

