

Healthy heart, healthy life

The Health Column

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The importance of doing something healthy for your heart is highlighted by the fact that 90% of Australians have at least one risk factor for heart disease. The main risk factors include a family history of heart disease, but the risk also increases as you age. Gender is important because men are at greater risk of predisposing conditions.

As a nation, we tend to take our hearts for granted but the sobering facts are that cardiovascular disease is the cause of 34% of deaths in Australia, followed by all cancers on 29%.

Research and awareness-raising is necessary in order to find cures for heart disease. As such February is designated as Red Feb (www.redfeb.com.au) by Heart Research Australia – the organisation which raises funds for research into the treatment and prevention of heart disease and associated medical conditions.



Photo by Emin OzKan | freemages.com

Information on healthy hearts is available at Heart Research Australia's website (www.heartresearch.com.au). The site also provides four simple steps that we can undertake to make some inroads into improving the health of our hearts.

The first step is to keep moving at any age and at any level of fitness. Exercise has many benefits beyond fitness and flexibility. Exercise stimulates the body's immune system, reduces the blood's ability to clot easily, improves brain function and lowers blood pressure.

Exercise can even prevent some forms of cancer. Research in older patients with age-related muscle wasting (also called sarcopenia) has shown that strength training was found to prevent disability, slow down dementia and reduce the risk of accidental falls. In later life independence and good health are closely related to physical fitness.

The second step is to look at what we eat and to ensure we eat wisely. Good nutrition extends beyond controlling our intake of cholesterol, calories and chocolate. There is also great benefit in understanding the importance of trans fats (bad for you), and polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats (good for you). Or how the body metabolises different carbohydrates (sugars) and the impact this has on weight, diabetes and body fat deposits.

Research consistently shows that the right balance between food intake and exercise is vital for optimum weight, fitness and health.

The third step suggested is to keep track of our health measurements. This includes cholesterol levels, blood pressure, weight, sugar levels, and exercise capacity. For years health professionals have understood the value of monitoring blood pressure, cholesterol levels, sugar level and body weight. To this we can now add the importance of measuring heart pump function (ejection fraction), exercise capacity (6 minute walk test), waist circumference, and kidney function, among many others. A close relationship between the family doctor, pharmacist and consumer will optimise the way good health is measured and monitored.

Finally, the fourth step is our mental approach and staying optimistic. Studies show our state of mind can protect, as well as damage, heart health. Important risk factors that may lead to heart disease include stress, anger and depression and these can be as damaging as high cholesterol levels in causing heart disease. Conversely, a positive state of mind, a supportive community, and personal happiness may help reduce cardiovascular problems.

Your local pharmacy is your health destination and can provide a range of products, medicines, services and advice to support heart health. These include:

- prescription medicine and medicine advice
- health advice such as managing your weight
- blood pressure monitoring
- services to help you lose weight and quit smoking.

Visit your local pharmacy today and find out what they have available.

In addition, you can get more information on heart health from pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information. Self Care Fact Cards available from these pharmacies include topics such as *High blood pressure* as well as lifestyle topics such as *Staying a non-smoker*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.