



February is heart health month

The cause of heart disease, as with most other complex conditions, is multifactorial. Genetics are partially to blame, and there is little we can do to change that, but lifestyle habits and modifiable risk factors are infinitely more important when it comes to prevention of cardiovascular disease.

Modifiable Risk Factors:

90% of Canadian people have at least one risk factor for heart disease.

- **Smoking**
- **Excessive alcohol intake**
- **Excess abdominal fat**
- **Physical inactivity**
- **Poor Diet**
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Stress

♥ 86% of heart attacks in men can be prevented by changing lifestyle habits

These risk factors are so critically important that a recent study found if the top 5 risk factors were improved, the chance of experiencing a heart attack was reduced by 86%. Changing your lifestyle is no easy feat, and often requires the guidance and support of a medical professional. Naturopathic doctors can help you break addictions, choose the diet that is right for you and help motivate you to stay on track.



Don't Blame Cholesterol: a deeper look into the cause of cardiovascular disease

The heart is an amazing organ. It pumps oxygenated blood throughout your body, keeping every little cell from your brain down to your toes happy and alive. As your heart pumps, blood flows through your arteries, capillaries, and veins surging along like a powerful river, going where it's needed, unobstructed and free. Recent research has shown that as many as one in three baby boomers will develop heart problems or have a stroke in their lives. What is it about our hearts (or our lifestyles) that make these numbers so high?

♥ Heart disease is the number one killer of women (over 55) and men in North America

For a while now, the medical community has blamed cholesterol for these scary heart disease numbers. Too much cholesterol, especially too much “bad” low density lipoprotein (LDL)-cholesterol, not enough “good” high density lipoprotein (HDL)-cholesterol and a high total cholesterol-to-HDL-ratio has your cardiovascular risk in the red! However, a large number of people who have myocardial infarctions (aka heart attacks) do NOT have abnormal lipid profiles, in fact, their cholesterol is just fine. What's up with that?

Atherosclerosis is defined as hardening of the arteries.

How does this happen? We have approximately 96,000

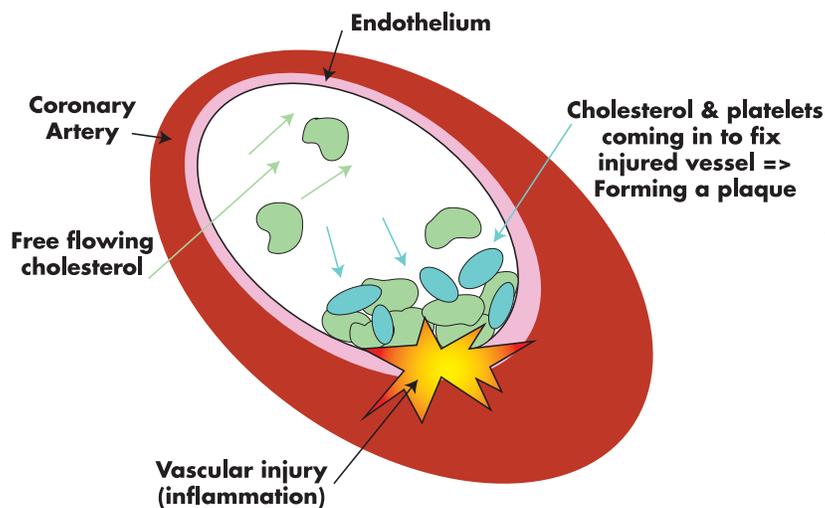
kilometers of blood vessels in our body.

Their beautiful elasticity

allows for the movement of

blood to reach and nourish every tiny cell in the body. The thin layer of cells, lining our arteries is called the endothelium and just like any other tissue is subject to damage. A small nick in the endothelium sets off an alarm sounding for repair similarly to how your body responds to a cut finger. White blood cells rush in to “fix” the nick. Platelets stick together, cholesterol settles in, and the patchwork band-aid is made. If the cholesterol becomes oxidized, creating a negative charge, it attracts positively charged calcium (remember redox reactions in high school chemistry?). Now there is a nice deposition or plaque of immune cells, platelets, oxidized cholesterol, and calcium causing hardening of the blood vessel wall, thus restricting the ease of blood flow.

As you can see, although cholesterol is involved in atherosclerosis, it is not the flame that ignites the cardiovascular risk scenario; it is the “nick”. Many leading physicians suspect the cause of the nick to be INFLAMMATION. In fact, some researchers postulate the effects of the infamous Statin drug class to have more to do with inflammatory modification, as oppose to their cholesterol lowering properties. Naturopathic physicians view most chronic diseases as having a



strong link to inflammatory insult: cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, cancer, autoimmune disease, type II diabetes, irritable bowel disease, chronic pulmonary disease such as COPD, and neurological disease such as Alzheimer’s disease, and on and on. When there is “dis-ease,” in your body, your body tries to fix it. Creating the patchwork band-aid is merely the body’s attempt to heal itself.

Instead of blaming the cholesterol, what if we looked at the root cause of atherosclerosis, the initial damage or “nick”, in the first place? What if we prevented nicks from happening by reducing inflammation and in turn decreased the occurrence of heart disease and all chronic inflammatory conditions?

Ways to reduce inflammation, oxidation, and support healthy blood flow:

1 Eat More and Less: eat more veggies and fruits, more fibre, more heart healthy omega-3 fats, and more plant-based protein; eat less processed foods, trans fats, less animal products, and less refined carbohydrates

2 Stop Smoking: if there is one thing you can do to decrease your overall morbidity (a diseased state) and mortality

(death), it is smoking cessation. Ask the naturopathic physicians at Arc, licensed in traditional Chinese acupuncture how it can help you quit!

3 Get Moving: being physically active improves blood circulation, reduces stress, and helps maintain a healthy weight, amongst many more health benefits that extend beyond cardiorespiratory fitness.

4 Get Tested: Find out if you have food sensitivities and intestinal permeability causing systemic inflammation with a simple blood spot (finger prick) test. Have a cardiovascular risk profile and risk assessment done. The integrative doctors at Arc have specifically designed a comprehensive laboratory profile to assess cardiovascular risk based on the most recent research. Along with helpful biomarkers, your naturopathic doctor at Arc Integrative Medicine can calculate your 5 year and 10 year cardiovascular risk and develop a targeted treatment plan for you.

♥ Inflammation, as mea

C-reactive protein (hs-CRP) an independent cardiovas

produced in response to infl

as cytokines in the body. K

provides information about t

stroke, especially in women

predictor of cardiovascular

Women, especially

get your hs-

5 Supplement

Appropriately: There are many fantastic botanical medicines, nutraceuticals, and powerful foods with anti-inflammatory properties. Curcumin, fish oil, and CoQ10 are only a few of the amazing anti-inflammatory stars out there.



Nutrition and Prevention of CVD

It is clear that lifestyle modifications are incredibly important in prevention, but what is even more impressive is that these same modifications are still the first-line therapy (instead of drug treatment) for all patients with stage I or II hypertension. Nutrition is only one piece of the puzzle, but it is the most important. Traditionally, the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet has been recommended for the treatment of cardiovascular disease.

measured by high sensitivity
) has been established as
cardiac risk factor. Hs-CRP is
inflammatory molecules known
knowing the level of hs-CRP
the risk of heart disease and
as it appears to be a better
events than LDL-cholesterol.
over the age of 55
-CRP tested!

The DASH diet has been used successfully for many years. There is nothing complicated or special about this diet – it is just plain healthy eating: high in veggies, fruits, lean proteins, whole, unprocessed grains, healthy fats and low sodium. Recent research has however called into question one small component – Salt. You may be familiar with the term “Salt Sensitive”, referring to a subset of people that can see a reduction in blood pressure when sticking to a low-sodium diet. The number of people that are truly salt sensitive is thought to be around 25%. Which means, all the attention that has been focused on sodium could be somewhat misguided. A recent study reviewed the impact that our other favorite white crystals have on hypertension, and the results are staggering. Sugar is emerging as a major player in the development of cardiovascular disease. **A person who consumes more than 25% of calories from added sugar has a threefold increase in risk of death from cardiovascular disease.** The underlying cause of sugar’s demise is most likely the inflammatory nature of added sugars. The good news is that the risk of sugar intake does not seem to apply to naturally occurring sugars found in fruits – so skip the sweet treats and reach for a handful of delicious berries.

♥ Take home message:

A sprinkling of sea salt on your home cooked meals is most likely healthy, while added sugars, in any amount are not good for your heart health.

Saturated fat myth busted

There is another long-standing misconception about nutrition and cardiovascular disease (CVD) that we need to understand, and that is the saturated fat myth. We all grew up in a world where saturated fat was demonized and low-fat diet fads prevailed. With the continued explosion of obesity and emergence of high fat, low carb diets much more research has been done to clearly understand the connection between fats and CVD. Surprisingly, no one has been able to prove this long thought connection; some studies in fact have found saturated fats to be cardio protective. The reasons behind this are complex and not fully understood, but what is clear is that a calorie is not a calorie, and the high-density of saturated fats does not correlate to an increase in cardiovascular disease or obesity. Your body is more efficient at burning fats for fuel than protein or carbohydrates.

♥ **There is no evidence to suggest that saturated fats cause cardiovascular disease**

Now, this does not mean that all saturated fats are created equally and trans-fats are still a giant health hazard. Saturated fats, especially of animal origin can harbor pesticides, chemicals and hormones used in agricultural practices.

A few saturated fats you should consider adding back into your diet:

- Organic virgin coconut oil
- Organic, grass-fed butter
- Organic whole eggs (yolk and all!)
- Organic, grass-fed beef

Hibiscus, Hawthorn, and the Heart

Crataegus oxyacantha (Hawthorn) is known as a cardiotoxic herb. Simply stated, hawthorn will help keep the heart healthy. It is a very safe herb used as part of the treatment for conditions such as mild to moderate congestive heart failure, angina pectoris, and hypertension (high blood pressure). Belonging to the Rosaceae family, its rich content of flavones and flavonoids contribute to the healing impact of hawthorn on the cardiovascular system. The whole hawthorn plant (berry, leaf, flower) makes a very pleasant tea or can be added to the diet as food.

Hibiscus sabdariffa (Sour tea) is another cardiotoxic herb. Historically, folk medicine has used *Hibiscus* for the treatment of hypertension.

Studies show *Hibiscus* reducing both systolic and diastolic blood pressure in both medicated and unmedicated populations, diabetics with hypertension, and in varying hypertension stages. Dried hibiscus (flowers and leaves) is often added to commercial tea blends for its pleasing taste and excellent safety profile.



Healthy Heart Tea:

Equal parts of dried Hawthorn and Hibiscus, infuse covered for 5 - 7 minutes and drink 1 cup of heart healthy tea twice daily.

Please ask your qualified healthcare practitioner before starting any new medicines or remedies.



Please call, email or book an appointment online



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