

Heart Conditions

Definition

Heart conditions are the number one preventable killer of US men and women. Several conditions affect the heart and include blood vessel problems (atherosclerosis, coronary artery disease), heart rhythm problems (arrhythmias), and heart defects from birth (congenital heart defects). These heart conditions can cause high blood pressure (hypertension), chest pain (angina), heart attacks, and strokes.

Early signs and symptoms

Signs and symptoms of heart disease vary and depend on which type of heart condition you have. Most often men and women experience different symptoms. Men usually experience some form of chest, jaw or neck pain, and numbness or tingling in the fingers or toes. Women are more likely to experience shortness of breath, back pain, nausea or fatigue. These symptoms can be momentary or lingering. For more information on symptoms specific to each heart condition use this link: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-disease/basics/symptoms/con-20034056>

Treatment

If you suspect you have any type of heart condition it is best to consult a doctor immediately. Heart conditions can develop slowly over many years but have quick and deadly consequences.

Heart conditions discovered early can be treated with lifestyle changes. These typically include increasing physical exercise and decreasing consumption of fatty foods. Heart conditions discovered too late to be reversed by lifestyle changes are usually treated with medication to increase blood flow to the heart, lower cholesterol and help regulate the heart's rhythm. Usually medication is used in addition to lifestyle changes. Medication alone can achieve small benefits. At this time surgery may also be needed to help open the arteries (stints) or bypass clogged arteries (bypass surgery) which helps to ease the heart's work.

Resources

American Heart Association:

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Caregiver/Resources/WhatIsCardiovascularDisease/What-is-Cardiovascular-Disease_UCM_301852_Article.jsp#.V-BrrV4VDIU

WebMD: <http://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/>