



Take Care of Your Heart

With Valentine's Day quickly approaching I would like to take the opportunity to talk about caring for YOUR heart. We are all aware of the benefits of controlling blood pressure and cholesterol. We have also heard the benefits of routine physical activity, not smoking and maintaining a healthy weight. These risk factors alone may not explain all the reasons for developing heart and cardiovascular diseases. Other emerging risk factors and developing technology may help to further determine if you are at risk for heart disease. You may want to discuss with your health provider if any of the markers below should be considered in your overall health evaluation.

C-reactive protein: CRP is a protein your liver produces when the body needs help fighting infection or injury. It is a part of your immune system. CRP is a nonspecific sign of inflammation within the body. Inflammation plays an important role in the development of atherosclerosis, which causes fatty deposits in your arteries. Studies show that high levels of CRP are associated with an increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and sudden cardiac death. Presently the American Heart Association is not recommending this screening for the general public - only those at known risk of heart disease. High levels will not always indicate heart disease and further tests may be done to determine other causative factors.

Homocysteine: Homocysteine is an amino acid and high levels may also promote atherosclerosis. Homocysteine levels may drop if you get plenty of folate and B vitamins in your diet. You can obtain these through green leafy vegetables, and fortified grain products. It is still not clear if reducing your homocysteine level can actually reduce your risk of death from heart and vascular disease but it may be helpful if you have a history of heart disease with no traditional risk factors.

Fibrinogen: Fibrinogen is a protein produced by the liver that plays a key role in blood clotting. People who have elevated levels may be at risk of heart attack or stroke. Fibrinogen promotes clumping of platelets, which can lead to further blood clotting. Smoking, inactivity, diabetes, estrogen supplements, high LDL cholesterol, and diabetes may elevate fibrinogen.

Brain Natriuretic Peptide: BNP is a protein that your heart and blood vessels produce. BNP acts as a natural diuretic, eliminating fluid, relaxing blood vessels, and funneling sodium into the urine. The BNP concentration in your blood can help in the diagnosis and evaluation of heart failure and other conditions. If your heart is working harder, as in heart failure or following a heart attack, our body secretes very high levels of BNP into your blood stream. If you are being treated for heart failure BNP levels may be monitored to aid in treatment decisions.

Lipoprotein (a): Lipoprotein (a) is a type of blood fat. It forms when a low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol particle attaches to a specific protein. The protein that carries Lp (a) may disrupt your body's ability to dissolve blood clots. This could be associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, heart attack and stroke.

It is always important to have **regular check ups** with your doctor even when you are feeling well. Routine monitoring of cholesterol levels and blood pressure are ways to care for your heart and prevent disease. Always talk with your doctor about chest pains no matter how infrequent or unimportant they seem.

Lord, we pray that you will keep us and those we love safe and close to your heart. Help us to know when to seek the care that we need to say well. Guide us and our doctors in making the right decisions.

Source: American Heart Association, 2005, Mayo Clinic, (2005), Blood Tests for Heart Disease., Women's Heart Advantage-Newsletter. (2005) New Markers for Heart Disease: Can They Predict Risk? Summer 2005.

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**Blood Pressure
Screening:**

Sun., February 17
9:00 AM

Office Hours

Tuesday 1-3 p.m.