

A Heart To Health Talk

Almost 14 million Americans have a history of heart attack or angina. It is now one of the leading causes of death in the United States. More than 1 million Americans have heart attacks each year. A heart attack, or myocardial infarction (MI), is permanent damage to the heart muscle. "Myo" means muscle, "cardial" refers to the heart and "infarction" means death of tissue due to lack of blood supply.

Nutrition and energy are delivered to the entire body by blood from the pumping heart. The heart itself requires constant energy in the form of oxygen and nutrients, which all come from the blood that delivered through the coronary arteries. A blockage in the coronary arteries prevents blood flow and causes the heart muscle to starve. The medical term for such starvation is ischemia, a condition that is accompanied by a chest discomfort called angina. If the blockage is severe, some of the heart muscle actually dies. When heart muscle dies, this is called a heart attack or myocardial infarction.

Fortunately, modern medicine already offers medical treatment acute heart attack. Preventive measures have been identified and are now being taught to prevent such an attack from occurring or recurring. Beta blockers are medications used to decrease heart rate and blood pressure. These can be given through an intravenous (IV) line or by mouth. Oxygen is used via nose plugs or a facemask if a person is having a heart attack. This is useful if breathing is difficult or the amount of oxygen in the blood is low.

Aspirin is used to decrease blood clotting. It works by preventing platelets from sticking together. Plavix (clopidogrel) is an additional platelet blocker given to those having a heart attack. Both aspirin and plavix are pills given by mouth. Clotting inhibitors called heparin, lovenox, and 2B3A are given via the IV and can help prevent the blockage from getting worse. A statin, or cholesterol pill, is often given to those having a heart attack. This too can stabilize a blockage and prevent it from getting worse. Chest pain can be decreased with nitroglycerine. This is given in a variety of ways, a dissolving pill under the tongue, a paste on the chest, or via the IV. Nitroglycerine helps dilate the coronary arteries allowing more blood to flow through. Morphine is another medication to control chest discomfort and ease anxiety. These medications mentioned work to stabilize a blockage, however, they are not very effective in removing one that has already formed. This job is done by "clot buster" medications or thrombolytics. T-PA (tissue plasminogen activator) and similar medicines can break apart a blockage and restore blood flow. Alternatively, this can be done with a balloon and stent procedure by a cardiologist.

However, there are practical ways that can lessen the chances of having a heart attack. Consuming at least five fruits and vegetables daily, exercising at least 2.5 hours per week, maintaining a healthy weight and not smoking can decrease your chances of heart trouble by 35 percent, and the risk of dying by 40 percent, compared to people with less healthy lifestyles. Research have shown that people who eat a balanced diet and exercise more can substantially reduce their risk for cardiovascular disease and death even if they're in their 50s or 60s. Most experts agree that a health-promoting lifestyle such as eating well, being active, and not smoking can cut overall risk of heart disease by 80 percent. Indeed, adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle makes a difference.

About the Author

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