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Nurture Your Cardiovascular Health

The cardiovascular system consists of the heart and blood vessels, and is responsible for carrying nutrients and oxygen to the tissues and removing carbon dioxide and other waste from them. Diseases affecting the cardiovascular system include arteriosclerosis, coronary artery disease, heart valve disease, arrhythmia, heart failure, hypertension, orthostatic hypotension, shock, endocarditis, diseases of the aorta and its branches, disorders of the peripheral vascular system and congenital heart disease. February is the American Heart Association's Heart Health Awareness Month, emphasizing the importance of cardiovascular health and the dangers of cardiovascular disease.



Cardiovascular disease is the leading health threat, with heart disease and stroke topping the list of the first and second leading causes of death worldwide. One out of every two men and one out of every three women will develop heart disease sometime in their life.

Despite dramatic medical advances over the past 50 years, heart disease remains a leading cause of death globally and the number one cause of death in the United States. Cardiovascular disease is not just a man's disease; in women, the condition is responsible for about 29 percent of deaths, reports the CDC. Although more men die of heart disease than women, females tend to be underdiagnosed, often to the point that it's too late to help them once the condition is discovered.

By integrating acupuncture and Oriental medicine into your heart-healthy lifestyle, you can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease by as much as 80 percent. Steps to prevention include managing high blood pressure and cholesterol, eating healthy, maintaining a healthy weight, physical activity, reducing stress, improving sleep quality and smoking cessation--all of which can be helped with acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

Five Steps to a Healthy Heart with Acupuncture

1. Manage High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure makes the heart work harder, increasing its oxygen demands and contributing to angina. This excessive pressure can lead to an enlarged heart (cardiomegaly), as well as damage to blood vessels in the kidneys and brain. It increases the risk of heart attacks, stroke and kidney disease.

Acupuncture has been found to be particularly helpful in lowering blood pressure. By applying acupuncture needles at specific sites along the wrist, inside the forearm or in the leg, researchers at the Susan Samueli Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, Irvine, were able to stimulate the release of opioids, which decreases the heart's activity and thus its need for oxygen. This, in turn, lowers blood pressure.

2. Maintain a Healthy Weight

Obesity is associated with diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary artery disease--all of which increase the risk of developing heart disease--but studies have shown that excess body weight itself (and not just the associated medical conditions) can also lead to heart failure. Even if you are entirely healthy otherwise, being overweight still places you at a greater risk of developing heart failure.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine are an excellent adjunctive tool when it comes to losing weight. They can help to energize the body, maximize the absorption of nutrients, regulate elimination, control overeating, suppress the appetite and reduce anxiety.

3. Reduce Stress

Stress is a normal part of life, but if left unmanaged, stress can lead to emotional, psychological and, even, physical problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, chest pains, or irregular heartbeats. Medical researchers aren't exactly sure how stress increases the risk of heart disease. Stress itself might be a risk factor, or it could be that high levels of stress make other risk factors worse. For example, if you are under stress, your blood pressure goes up, you may overeat, you may exercise less, and you may be more likely to smoke.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the substantial benefits of acupuncture in the treatment of stress, anxiety and mental health. In addition to acupuncture, Oriental medicine offers a whole gamut of tools and techniques that can be integrated into your life to keep stress in check. These tools include Tui Na, Qi Gong exercises, herbal medicine, dietary therapy, meditations and acupressure that you can administer at home.

4. Improve Sleep Quality

Poor sleep has been linked with high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, heart failure, heart attacks, stroke, diabetes and obesity. Researchers have shown that getting at least eight hours of sleep is needed for good heart-health and getting less than eight hours of sleep can put you at a greater risk for developing heart disease.

Acupuncture has shown great success treating a wide array of sleep problems without any of the side effects of prescription or over-the-counter sleep aids. The acupuncture treatments for problems sleeping focus on the root disharmony within the body that is causing the insomnia. Therefore, those who use acupuncture for insomnia achieve not only better sleep, but also an overall improvement of physical and mental health.

5. If You Smoke, Quit

Most people associate cigarette smoking with breathing problems and lung cancer. But did you know that smoking is also a major cause of coronary artery disease? In fact, about 20 percent of all deaths from heart disease are directly related to cigarette smoking.

Acupuncture has shown to be an effective treatment for smoking. Acupuncture treatments for smoking cessation focus on jitters, cravings, irritability and restlessness--symptoms that people commonly complain about when they quit. It also aids in relaxation and detoxification.

Come in for a consultation to see how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can assist you with your heart health and help you to live a long, healthy life!

Acupuncture for Cholesterol Management

What is cholesterol and how is it bad? Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in your body and many foods. Your body needs cholesterol to function normally and makes all that you need. Too much cholesterol can sometimes build up in your arteries. After a while, these deposits narrow your arteries, putting you at risk for heart disease and stroke. Since you can have high cholesterol without realizing it, it's important to have your blood cholesterol levels checked. Most of the 65 million Americans with high cholesterol have no symptoms.

High cholesterol can also develop in early childhood and adolescence, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the risk spikes as weight increases. In the United States alone, more than 20 percent of youth aged 12-19 years have at least one abnormal lipid level. Children over the age of two should have their cholesterol checked if they are overweight or obese, have a family history of high cholesterol or heart disease, have diabetes, high blood pressure, or certain chronic conditions such as kidney disease, inflammatory diseases, congenital heart disease and childhood cancer.

Research has clearly shown that lowering cholesterol can reduce the risk of developing heart disease. Whether you have heart disease already or want to prevent it, you can reduce your risk for having a heart attack by lowering your cholesterol level.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be used to treat many of the health conditions known to drastically increase the risk of heart disease and high cholesterol including smoking, high blood pressure, excess weight and diabetes. Speak to your health care providers to make sure your cholesterol is being monitored and find out how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you stay healthy.

Eat Heart Healthy Foods

Having a healthy diet is one of the best ways to support your cardiovascular health and prevent heart disease.

Here are just a few of the suggested foods that support a heart-healthy lifestyle:



Cruciferous Vegetables

Cruciferous vegetables such as kale, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, radish, turnips and cabbages are a gold mine of antioxidants and other heart-saving phytochemicals. Make sure that cruciferous vegetables are part of your heart-healthy diet every day.

Fish

Fatty fish such as salmon and anchovies are loaded with the omega-3 fatty acids that will help your heart maintain a steady rhythm. Having a serving of fish a week could reduce your risk of death from a heart attack by 52 percent.

Flaxseed

Flaxseed is one of the most potent sources of omega-3 fats. Studies indicate that adding flaxseed to your diet can reduce the development of heart disease by 46 percent and help keep red blood cells from clumping together and forming clots that can block arteries. Sprinkle 2 Tbsp of flax-seed a day on your cereal or salad.

Fruit

Oranges contain folic acid that helps lower levels of homocysteine, a heart attack risk factor.

Grapes are loaded with flavonoids and resveratrol, both potent antioxidants that may discourage red blood cells from clumping together and forming an artery-blocking clot.

Pomegranates are chock-full of potassium and polyphenols, which promote heart-health and have been shown to help lower cholesterol. The latest studies are showing that the juice limits the genetic tendency toward hardening of the arteries.

Garlic

Just one clove a day, or 300 mg three times daily, reduces the risk of heart attack in at least three ways:

- It discourages red blood cells from sticking together and blocking your arteries
- It reduces arterial damage
- It discourages cholesterol from lining the arteries and making them so narrow that blockages are likely.

Green Tea

Green tea contains several powerful antioxidants that reduce bad cholesterol and boost good cholesterol, improving an individual's overall cholesterol profile.

Drinking green tea also seems to enhance cardiovascular health by improving the consistency of platelets in the blood, and may even lower blood pressure.

Nuts

Studies have found that those who eat more than 5 oz of nuts a week are one-third less likely to have either heart disease or a heart attack. Just don't overdo it as nuts can pile on the pounds.
