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Feature-Heart
HOW KEEP HEART TROUBLE AT BAY

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KUALA LUMPUR: More Malaysians die of heart and blood vessel diseases than any other single cause and many of those premature deaths are preventable.

And if you think that heart attack only strikes at men and women who are overweight, have high cholesterol, high blood pressure or diabetes, then you are sadly mistaken.

Anyone, men or women, young or old, can suffer a heart attack if he/she does not take care of the heart.

Yet so many people still choose to ignore the warnings, said Heart Foundation of Malaysia director and consultant cardiologist, Dr Khoo Kah Lin.

He said a heart attack is caused by the total blockage of a coronary artery by a blood clot or by atherosclerosis, a disease in which the artery linings become gradually clogged up and, finally, completely blocked by various fatty deposits, thus shutting off blood flow to the heart.

Heart attacks which do not result in death often lead to serious complications: shock; cardiac arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat) or congestive heart failure, in which the heart cannot pump enough blood to meet the body's needs and fluid accumulates in the lower parts of the body.

The major symptom of a heart attack is a crushing pain in the middle of the chest, behind the breastbone; the pain can also extend down one or both arms, fatigue, heavy perspiration, dizziness, difficulty in breathing, and, occasionally, fever, may accompany this pain.

WHAT TO DO

Dr Khoo said a simple but powerful message about heart health is that much of the death, disability and illness caused by heart diseases is preventable.

Hence, he offered several tips that could bring big rewards for a healthy heart.

- * Help yourself and your friends to quit smoking.

Smoking restricts blood circulation and also increases the body's requirements for vitamins A, C and E. It can also increase blood pressure, cause heart diseases and irregular heartbeats.

If you cannot get them to stop, then insist on smoke-free environment since breathing secondhand smoke boosts heart attack risk by about 30 percent.

- * Think before you eat and enjoy a balanced diet.

Fatty meat, cheese, fried foods, butter and cakes are known to raise cholesterol levels. Eat more fish, fresh fruits and vegetables instead. Preferably, the fish should be steamed, baked or grilled. Avoid junk food and drinks high in caffeine like coffee, tea, chocolate. If you can't, take them in moderation.

- * Know your cholesterol level and keep it in the normal range.

You need small amounts of cholesterol to make and maintain nerve cells and to manufacture natural hormones. A normal, healthy range is between 4.5 and 5.5.

- * Maintain a healthy weight.

Overweight and obesity lead to an increased risks of premature death due to cardiovascular problems such as high blood pressure and coronary heart disease. The only way to lose weight safely and permanently is to exercise and modify eating habits permanently.

- * Make exercise a part of your lifestyle.

Exercising 20 minutes three times a week can do wonders for

anyone's health. Even a 30 minutes brisk walk daily will help to halve your risk. The heart, like any muscle, needs exercise to stay strong and inactivity may cause blood to clot more easily.

* Lead a more carefree life.

Stop the rat race and learn to relax. Take up a hobby and make time for yourself. Aggressive and impatient people who live in the fast lane have a much higher incidence of heart diseases. Try to limit stress by being physically active and by building up your social support network.

* Skin a (dead) chicken.

The skin of chicken is an absolute "no no" for people who are watching their fat intake. The skin contains high amounts of saturated fat.

* Go easy on yolks.

You can have all the eggs you like, as long as you leave the yolks aside. Egg yolks contain high amounts of cholesterol.

* Eat smaller meat portions and give up organ meats.

One way to cut down on saturated fat without giving up steaks is to keep your portion small. Like egg yolks, organ meats are best left alone. Although rich in iron and protein, these meats are also tremendously high in fat and cholesterol.

* Have a regular check up.

For menopausal women, the risk of developing heart disease increases. If you take Hormone Replacement Therapy, check with your doctor.

The following measurements are considered "heart-friendly" for women.
Blood pressure: less than 120/80 mmHg
Waist measurement: less than 80 cm
Weight: Body Mass Index - normal 18-25 kg/m².
(BMI= weight in kilograms divided by your height in meters square).

WORLD HEART DAY CELEBRATION

To mark World Heart Day today, the Heart Foundation of Malaysia is organising various heart health activities at Taman Botani, Putrajaya on Sept 28. It will be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Being chairman of World Heart Day celebration, Dr Khoo said the celebration, with the theme "Women, Heart Disease and Stroke", has planned various activities to translate the objective of World Heart Day, especially for all Malaysians.

Among others, it is aimed at creating greater awareness among the public, especially the youth, on how a healthy active lifestyle will prevent heart disease in the future.

The others are Walk A Mile, Walk 'n' Hunt, Exercise Demonstration and Teen game.

Walk A Mile is a one mile walk through the garden to promote walking as one of the best ways to develop strong heart. Walk 'n' Hunt requires participants to walk around Taman Botani looking for answers to a list of questions.

Well, the fact is that life is not as depressing as it sounds. Though heart diseases can be very common, one can do something to prevent it.

All you need to do is to eat wisely, exercise regularly, improve your lifestyle and be happy with life! -- Bernama

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