

WELL NOW...

A Health Newsletter Published By
The Student Health Center

Heart Health

Cardiovascular heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, killing at least 800,000 people each year and incapacitating millions more. A lifestyle strategy, initiated during your college years, is a good way to prevent the onset of heart disease and insure a rich and vigorous life.

But what is the best lifestyle strategy to follow? Physical activity is important and so is dealing with stress. There is also a strong link between nutrition and the risk of cardiovascular disease.

The diet-heart disease link is much more than just dietary cholesterol intake. In fact, dietary factors other than cholesterol content are very important in increasing your risk of cardiovascular disease at an early age.

Saturated fat, such as in animal fats, solid vegetable shortenings and the oil from deep-fat fryers, is likely to do more damage to your arteries than the moderate number (4-8) of eggs (high in cholesterol) you eat each week.

Americans tend to eat 50-90% more protein than their body requires. This excessive protein intake and a high intake of animal protein are also likely to increase your risk of cardiovascular disease more than your dietary cholesterol intake.

New evidence suggests that certain vitamins may also protect your arteries from disease. A recent study in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, (June 13, 1981), points to the importance of vitamin B6 in preventing abnormal clotting inside the arteries.

Clotting in the blood involves small cells called platelets, and abnormally "sticky" platelets which occur with a relative deficiency of vitamin B6. These "sticky" platelets may initiate unwanted clotting, a process which can cause early and progressive damage to the arteries.

The authors of the study suggest that the current diet for many people may be lacking optimal amounts of vitamin B6. Indeed, the B6 content of many individual's diet may be marginal or even deficient in vitamin B6.

One reason is that processing drastically reduces a food's B6 content. Seventy-five percent is lost in the milling of wheat and B6 is not replaced by enrichment. Heating and cooking can destroy 50-70% of the B6 content in vegetables and fruits. And drug use, especially oral contraceptives, can increase the need for vitamin B6 by 5-10 times.

So it is not unlikely that some individuals come up short on getting enough B6, and the long term consequences of marginal intake could mean early onset of heart disease.

Oranges, bananas, raw vegetables and whole grains and beans are the richest sources of vitamin B6. Eating fresh, wholesome food, without much frying or cooking, is probably a good dietary strategy to reduce your risk to cardiovascular disease.

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