

AVWC February 2016 Newsletter

February 2016 Edition

Dear <<First Name>>,

This month, we are letting people know about the wealth of information on our Facebook page. Many of our patients have found the carefully curated articles we post there to be helpful and informative. Take a look when you get a chance.

Heart Felt

Our issue this month has to do - surprise - with one of the most marvelous organs in the universe: our heart. As part of the celebration of the heart that happens this month, consider treating yourself to our HeartMath program. Less stress, more fun, better quality of life. What Valentine gift can beat that?

The Pain Tsunami

Chronic pain has become a major health problem for many Americans, in part because of the limited way it is addressed by conventional medicine. In fact, one of the main approaches - prescription of opioid drugs - has contributed to an epidemic of addiction and death. The problem is so huge that the FDA recently issued sweeping changes to its opioid policies. According to Medscape, one of these changes includes supporting, "better pain-management options, including alternative treatments." AVWC is completely in alignment with the FDA on this point.

While we are on this topic, we have some exciting news to share. In addition to the many modalities of our pain elimination program (acupuncture, electrotherapy, ultrasound, sleep optimization, biopuncture, dietary enhancement, etc.) we are working on something new. We are currently in discussions with an expert practitioner who does prolotherapy and platelet rich plasma (PRP) injections. We will be discussing this in more detail next month, but we would love to hear from you concerning any interest you might have in these modalities. We look forward to hearing from you!

In Health,
AVWC staff

Secrets to a Healthy Heart



Long before the ancient Greek surgeon Galen carried out meticulous dissections of the heart, the Egyptians wrote about health and disease in relation to how the heart "speaks in vessels" with the rest of the body. Today, physicians may not associate the heart with the soul (or soul mates), but many credit early Egyptian medical knowledge of the heart as a precursor to modern cardiology.

The Heart: Powerful, but Vulnerable

A key element of a healthy body is a healthy heart. The heart is the center of our cardiovascular system and beats an average of 100,000 times per day supplying oxygen rich blood to the whole body. Every day we make choices that have a profound affect on the health of this vital organ. Most heart disease (HD) is linked to risk factors such as lack of exercise, obesity, smoking, stress, and poor eating habits.

One major condition that can develop with these risk factors is Hypertension, also known as high blood pressure. Often called the 'silent killer', Hypertension can cause significant damage throughout the cardiovascular and other body systems and ultimately results in over 80 million deaths each year.

The Silent Killer

Blood pressure is the amount of pressure exerted on the inside of blood vessels as the heart pumps the blood through the body. When there is resistance in the vessels, the pressure rises and hypertension results. The longer hypertension goes undetected and/or uncontrolled, the greater the damage to blood vessels and other organs. Hypertension can lead to heart attack, stroke, ruptured blood vessels, kidney disease or failure, and heart failure.

Warning signs for high blood pressure are rare but can include headaches, blurred vision, lightheadedness, shortness of breath and nosebleeds. However, there are typically no warning signs or symptoms for hypertension, which is why it is called the silent killer.

Hypertension is diagnosed by looking at 2 numbers in your BP reading: *Systolic pressure* (the top number) is the pressure in your arteries when the heart beats (contracts). *Diastolic pressure* (bottom number) represents the pressure in your arteries between beats.

- Normal blood pressure is *below* 120/80
- Prehypertension is 120 - 139 systolic *or* 80 - 89 diastolic.
- Hypertension is 140/90 or higher

The Potassium Secret for a Healthy Heart

You've no doubt heard the best thing to do when you have hypertension is to reduce the amount of salt/sodium in your diet. This is somewhat controversial because, based on the research, this is mainly helpful to a some (but not all) individuals. Did you know the average adult needs 4,700 mg of potassium daily compared to only 200 mg of sodium. Unfortunately for most of us, our eating habits give us way too much sodium - 3,300 mg a day - and not nearly enough potassium. This imbalance can increase your risk of developing hypertension.

What's truly important for your heart, and a more accurate strategy to prevent high blood pressure, is to balance the relationship between potassium and sodium (salt) in your daily diet. Proper sodium-potassium balance is necessary for nerve transmission, muscle contraction, fluid balance, and the optimal health of all the cells in your body. In regard to the heart, potassium is particularly important for regulating heart rhythm and maintaining blood pressure.

By reducing your sodium intake, you are often correcting the sodium-potassium imbalance without realizing it. Expert guidance is typically recommended in this regard to ensure that this reduction is properly tailored to your unique situation. To further support your heart health, eat more potassium-rich foods such as sweet potato, spinach, banana, peas, legumes, apricots, avocados, halibut and molasses.

More Healthy Heart Tips

Heart-Healthy Diet Do's: Eat a variety of fresh fruits and dark green veggies daily. Use plant-based oils for cooking. Eat mindfully, not on-the-run. Reduce or eliminate packaged foods, sugar, and red meat.

Walk, No Need to Run: 30 minutes of daily, brisk walking lowers your risk for hypertension.

Be Calm: Learn to manage stress with healthy coping techniques, such as, deep breathing, yoga, meditation, gratitude journaling, and getting quality sleep.

Supplemental Support: Nutritional supplements shown to support heart health include Hawthorn CoQ10, Essential Fatty Acids, Magnesium, Garlic and B-vitamins. Supplements you might have heard about—Natto-K (nattokinase), Guggul, or Niacin—should not be taken without the supervision of your health practitioner.

Because some blood pressure medications affect the potassium level in the body, be sure and discuss the best strategy for making this adjustment with Dr. Thomas or Dr. Piscopo.

Food for Thought. . .

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart." - Helen Keller

Mighty Pomegranate (*Punica granatum*)



Inside a lumpy, thick-skinned pomegranate you'll find a treasure of jewel-like arils-ruby seeds surrounded by sacs of flavorful juice. Pomegranate is both richly sweet and tart and exceptionally refreshing. Savor the flavor by eating the arils by the spoonful, adding them to salads or to a bowl of Greek yogurt. Any way you choose, you'll reap the health benefits of this exotic fruit.

Pomegranate is native to the mountainous regions along the Caspian Sea, near northern Iraq and northwest Iran. For centuries, cultures around the world have used all parts of the tree-roots, bark, flowers, peel, seed and seed oil-medicinally to treat a range of health concerns, from digestive disorders and dysentery, to fever and heart ailments. In the West, the fruit and seed are typically used in medicinal preparations. Modern research indicates that pomegranate may be beneficial for reducing risk and supporting treatment for arthritis, certain types of cancers, erectile dysfunction, and heart disease.

A compound found only in pomegranates called punicalagin is beneficial to the heart and blood vessels. Punicalagin is responsible for pomegranate's antioxidant effects. In fact, pomegranate has more antioxidant power than red wine and green tea! Preliminary research shows that drinking unsweetened pomegranate juice helps lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, improve blood flow to the heart, and may help protect against the formation of blockages in the arteries. Further research is needed to determine how much pomegranate juice (or as a nutritional supplement) is beneficial for different people and for different health concerns.

When buying pomegranate, don't shy away from a fruit that isn't perfectly round or feels heavy. Unusual shape, and weight indicate a fruit that is plump with arils and juice. Pomegranates do not sweeten once picked, so you'll want to avoid fruits that look dried out or aged.

Garlic: Good for Your Heart!



It may not smell like a lily, but Garlic (*Allium sativum*) is an edible bulb from the lily family. Fondly known to herbalists as "the stinking rose", for centuries, there has been many traditional medicine uses for

Garlic, including treatment of skin conditions, immune support, antimicrobial and, to reduce risk for cancer and heart disease. In fact, Garlic is one of the most widely studied herbal supplements for its beneficial effects on the heart.

Garlic contains several vitamins and minerals that support heart health, including vitamin B6, vitamin C, manganese, and selenium. But it's the chemicals that give garlic its pungent odor that scientists believe are the source of the herb's heart health-promoting effects. Garlic is rich in the *allicin*, *alliin*, and *ajoene* — antioxidant compounds that help reduce the risk for cardiovascular disease.

Studies on garlic and the cardiovascular system typically use garlic powder, oil, or aged extracts. To date, the effects of garlic on the heart that are supported by science include:

- Slows the development of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries)
- Reduces blood pressure
- Reduces triglycerides and therefore lowers total cholesterol

The amount of active compounds supplied by garlic supplements can vary because allicin is very sensitive to things such as air and heat. For example, aging garlic to reduce its odor also reduces the allicin present and compromises the effectiveness of the product.

Generally safe for most adults, taking a garlic supplement can cause heartburn, upset stomach, an allergic reaction, and breath and body odor (common with raw garlic). Garlic should not be taken by persons who are preparing for surgery or who have bleeding disorders because it can impair the body's ability to form blood clots.

Hawthorn (*Crataegus oxyacantha*)



Hawthorn, also known as Maybush, is a thorny shrub found on hillsides and in sunlit woodsey areas throughout the world. Over centuries, all parts of the plant have been used to prepare foods, beverages, and medicines. In folk medicine, Hawthorn was used for the treatment of diarrhea, insomnia, and asthma. In China, it has been used to treat digestive problems, high cholesterol, poor circulation, and shortness of breath. During the early 1800s, doctors in North America used Hawthorn to treat heart conditions, circulatory, and respiratory disorders.

Hawthorn has a rich supply of flavonoids (antioxidants that protect cells from damage) and anti-

inflammatory properties, which are important to heart health. It plays a role in helping dilate blood vessels, improves blood flow to the heart, and lowers blood pressure. In Europe, Hawthorn is regarded as a safe and effective treatment for early-stage heart disease. It is used to promote the health of the circulatory system and to treat angina, high blood pressure, and congestive heart failure. In studies, patients with heart failure who took Hawthorn showed improvement in clinical symptoms and sense of wellbeing.

Hawthorn is available as tea, capsule, tincture, and standardized extract found in prescription drugs, over-the-counter medication, standardized herbal medicine, or dietary supplements. Before taking Hawthorn, especially if you suspect or have a heart or lung condition, please consult with Dr. Thomas or Dr. Piscopo.

The Power of Breath: Lower Blood Pressure, Reduce Stress



When you don't manage stress effectively you place an unnecessary burden on the one muscle that keeps you alive: the heart. When you're stressed, your body goes into "fight or flight" response. The brain releases hormones that cause your heart to pump faster, thicken your blood, and raise blood pressure. If you constantly experience this stress response, it eventually changes the way the heart and blood system function—putting you at risk for heart disease.

There's a "cure" you can use anytime, anywhere to change the way you respond to stress and actually lower blood pressure and protect your heart from the deadly grip of stress. Cardiologist, Dr. John Kennedy, developed 'The 15 Minute Heart Cure'—a set of simple breathing techniques that creates a connection between the heart and brain. This method helps you calm down, reenergize, and protects your heart all at the same time.

To get the most out of using this technique, try to do it at the same time each day.

B in **B-R-E-A-T-H-E = Beginning.** Begin in a quiet space where you won't be interrupted for 15-minutes. Begin with a positive attitude. View this time as a gift to your health. Seated in a comfortable position, try to clear all thoughts and bring focus to the your breath, slowly inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.

R in **B-R-E-A-T-H-E = Relaxation.** Relaxation brought about by this technique creates changes in brain

waves and the rhythm of your heart. Visualize yourself walking on a 'path to relaxation', perhaps a beautiful hiking path. With each step, you become more and more relaxed.

E in B-R-E-A-T-H-E = Envision. Walt Disney, Steve Jobs and Deepak Chopra are called visionaries for good reason. Research shows envisioning is an important part of achieving a goal-be it a story, a revolutionary digital device, or a new paradigm in medicine. Imagine your heart as powerful and strong. Research also shows that imagery can lower your heart rate, lower blood pressure, and strengthen your immune system.

A in B-R-E-A-T-H-E = Apply. In Dr. Kennedy's book, there are heart-healing images and metaphors for you to apply during your 15-minute practice *and* during stressful moments. Tapping into the imagery, even from memory, can help break the cycle of stress *in the moment it is happening*.

T in B-R-E-A-T-H-E = Treatment. Your time spent with this technique is no different than taking time for a spa-treatment. See this time as a 15-minute oasis that you create.

H in B-R-E-A-T-H-E = Heal. This technique will strengthen neural networks that connect your heart and brain so that your body easily shifts from stress response to relaxation response. Healing is more likely to occur in a relaxed state, bringing more oxygen into muscles, lowering pulse rate and blood pressure, and enhancing immune response.

E in B-R-E-A-T-H-E = End. After 15-minutes of mindful focus on the breath and heart-healing imagery, you will feel deeply relaxed and energized and revitalized. As you end your session, quietly notice your surroundings and visualize how you can use the technique throughout your day.

See the Resources list for more detailed instructions and information about the book and the app.