

Natural Remedies to Treat and Prevent Heart Disease

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Heart disease is America's number-one killer. Yet heart disease, which is primarily caused by inflammation and an accumulation of plaque in the coronary arteries, is one of the most preventable of all illnesses.

The key is to make lifestyle changes and take natural supplements. In fact, there is scientific evidence that people who already are suffering from heart problems can reverse the effects of the disease.

Here are three all-natural programs -- one for general heart health, another for high cholesterol, a third for high blood pressure. Choose one, two or all three programs.

If you are doing more than one at a time, don't double or triple up on supplements. Take no more than the highest amount called for in one program. All the supplements listed are available at most health-food stores.

Regular aerobic exercise is part of each of these programs, and I offer advice on getting the most out of exercise at the end of this article.

Important: Review these programs, including supplement dosages, with your doctor. Natural remedies are not a substitute for traditional treatment but are meant to be done in conjunction with whatever your primary doctor or cardiologist recommends.

GENERAL HEART HEALTH

Your body needs certain nutrients to counteract the effects of internal inflammation on the coronary arteries...

Coenzyme Q10, one of my favorites, is a superstar in protecting the heart. It increases oxygenation to the heart and helps prevent recurrences in people who have had a heart attack. *Recommendation:* 100 mg to 300 mg daily.

Omega-3 fatty acids decrease the growth rate of atherosclerotic plaque, which can lead to arteriosclerosis, known as hardening of the arteries. Omega-3s also reduce the risk of arrhythmias, which can lead to sudden cardiac death. *Recommendation:* 3,000 mg daily.

L-carnitine helps transport long-chain fatty acids, which bring energy to the heart and aid in prevention of heart disease, high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases. *Recommendation:* 500 mg to 1,000 mg daily.

Vitamin E, which has *tocotrienols* and *gamma tocopherol*, is an antioxidant that helps protect cells against damage. *Recommendation:* 200 international units (IU) to 400 IU daily.

Cayenne pepper contains the active ingredient *capsaicin*, a natural blood thinner that helps prevent heart attacks and strokes. *Dosage:* Sprinkle regularly on food. *Caution:* Check with your doctor if you are on a blood thinning medication, such as *warfarin* (Coumadin).

Hawthorn berry relaxes blood vessels, enhances circulation and helps prevent arterial hardening. *Recommendation:* 100 mg twice daily.

REDUCE CHOLESTEROL

Elevated levels of cholesterol are a major marker for heart attacks. Cholesterol provides the raw material for plaque, a fatty substance that builds up inside arteries and clogs them. *Optimal levels:* A combined blood cholesterol count under 200 mg/dL, with LDL levels (often referred to as "bad" cholesterol) under 100 mg/dL and HDL levels ("good" cholesterol) over 40 mg/dL.

L-carnosine is an amino acid found naturally in the body. This antioxidant helps rejuvenate cells and protect them from premature aging. *Recommendation:* 500 mg to 1,000 mg daily.

Niacin/vitamin B3, also known as *nicotinic acid*, lowers LDL cholesterol and raises HDL cholesterol. *Recommendation:* 100 mg daily.

Shiitake mushrooms speed up the processing of cholesterol in the liver and stimulate the immune system. *Recommendation:* One-half to one cup of shiitake mushrooms daily. I like them lightly sauteed in olive oil. Fruits and fruit juices are rich in phytonutrients, which are powerful antioxidants. *Recommendation:* Two to three servings daily. Look for juices that have no added sugar. *Best:* Tart cherry, pomegranate, wild blueberry.

LOWER HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Prolonged high blood pressure (hypertension) damages the lining of the arteries that supply blood to the heart. This can lead to arteriosclerosis. *Optimal blood pressure levels:* A systolic rate (the top number) under 120 mm/Hg and a diastolic rate (the bottom number) under 80 mm/Hg.

Calcium citrate and magnesium. This combination supplement promotes relaxation of the muscles, including the heart. *Recommendation:* 1,500 mg daily.

Garlic lowers blood pressure by thinning the blood, thus enhancing circulation. *Recommendation:* Two to three cloves daily. It is easiest to digest when sauteed until translucent (not brown). Or take a 1,000-mg garlic supplement, but check with your doctor if you are on a blood-thinning drug.

Potassium is needed for electrolyte balance, especially if you take blood pressure medication. *Recommendation:* 500 mg daily.

Green vegetable juices, especially those from spinach, broccoli and kale, help thin the blood, lowering blood pressure. You can buy them at health-food stores or make them yourself with a vegetable juicer (add a pear or an apple if you like a sweeter taste). *Recommendation:* Two to three six-ounce servings daily. Check with your doctor if you are on blood-thinning medication.

EXERCISE

Regular aerobic exercise, such as fast walking, reduces cholesterol, increases circulation and keeps arteries healthy. To get the most out of exercise...

Work up to 45 minutes of aerobic exercise four times a week. This can take several months. Get a clean bill of health from your doctor before starting.

Take your pulse. Take it before you exercise, then immediately upon stopping, then every five minutes until your pulse has returned to its pre-exercise level. You know you are in shape if your pulse returns to its pre-exercise level in less than five minutes.

When you walk or jog, keep your feet as close to the ground as possible, almost as if you're shuffling. The higher the knee comes off the ground, the greater the pressure and the risk of injury when your leg comes down.