



Prevent a Heart Attack

Public Information Pamphlets

Heartfile ©
Fighting Heart Disease
<http://heartfile.org>



PREVENT A HEART ATTACK

Heart attack is a dreaded disease; this pamphlet contains a general guideline for the public, aiming to create awareness about the risk factors that cause a heart attack.

Do you know what a "Heart Attack" is and how it happens?

"Heart Attack" is one of the commonest serious illnesses suffered by men and women today. A Heart Attack means that a part of the heart muscle has been damaged by sudden blockade of its blood flow, so that it cannot contract and perform its usual role of pumping blood.

Heart attack" is the result of two main processes. One is known as 'Atherosclerosis', in this condition there is a gradual build up, over a number of years of "fatty substance" in the walls of the blood vessels which supply the heart muscle its share of blood (hardening of the blood vessels).

The second is 'Thrombosis', i.e., the development of a blood "clot" in that blood vessel, which occurs rapidly. Heart Attack is often a sudden event that occurs when a blood clot develops at the site of a narrowing in the blood vessel and cuts off the blood supply to the muscle beyond.

There are several things one can do to reduce the risk of a Heart Attack. A useful point to remember is that all of them promote healthy living in general and help prevent other diseases in addition to Heart Attacks.

Do you know what “your” risk factors for the development of a Heart Attack are?

There are certain risk factors that increase the likelihood of developing a Heart Attack. The overall ‘risk’ of developing a ‘Heart Attack’ differs considerably from one person to another depending upon the number of ‘risk factors’.

Your risk is higher if

- if you are a man (though the disease is also fairly common in women, specially in our part of the world)
- if you are above the age of 40 years.
- if you smoke.
- if you are overweight and exercise less.
- if your parents, brothers or sisters particularly under the age of 55 years have had a Heart Attack.
- if you suffer from high Blood Pressure or Diabetes
- if you are overly stressed
- if you have high levels of Cholesterol (fat) in your blood

Any of the above, increase the chances of your developing a Heart Attack. Your risk increases when a combination of these factors is present. The more the factors that are present; greater is your risk.

Recommended guidelines for preventing a Heart Attack

Each risk factor will be discussed individually

Smoking

Avoiding smoking is the single most important step you can take to reduce your risk of developing a Heart Attack, it is especially important since it is something

entirely in your hands, and injurious for your health in many other ways as well. People who smoke one pack of cigarettes a day double their risk of developing a Heart Attack as compared to those who do not smoke. This risk is even higher for those who smoke more than one pack a day and especially so if they are less than 50 years of age. Given these facts it is encouraging to know that if you quit smoking before having a Heart Attack, your risk of developing a Heart Attack will be that of a non smoker in 3 years time. Don't wait until you have had heart disease to quit smoking, act ahead of time and quit smoking now!

For detailed information on the effects of smoking on the heart and the ways to quit smoking see the Heartfile public information pamphlet on "Smoking and Your Heart".

Your weight

In general being overweight is a risk factor for Angina and Heart Attacks. Reducing weight and bringing it in the acceptable range will not only reduce your risk of a Heart Attack, but the diet that you will take to do so will also help in lowering your blood Cholesterol and keeping high Blood Pressure and Diabetes under control. All these have an additive effect towards preventing a Heart Attack.

Your Diet

The main reasons for changing your diet to have a healthy heart are to loose weight and to reduce the level of Cholesterol in blood. Such a diet also has to be modified if you also have high Blood Pressure or Diabetes.

A general guideline is outlined. For details on diet and the heart see the Heartfile public information pamphlet on "Food and Your Heart"

To reduce Cholesterol: You need to reduce the amount of "saturated" fat and Cholesterol in the diet. To do that:

- Cut down on fat from animal source, which consists of red meats (beef and mutton), organ meats (liver, kidney brain, brain being the worst), cream (balai), milk with balai, products made with such milk and egg yolk.
- Also modify cooking fat. Instead of using "banaspati ghee" or "asli ghee" use cooking oils. Choose from vegetable, sunflower, canola, corn or soybean oils. Edible olive oil is the best form of oil for the heart, but because it is very expensive in Pakistan it cannot be used commonly. Use cooking oil sparingly in "salan" and avoid fried food in any form.
- Fish is protective for the heart and is recommended twice a week. Fish should be barbecued or grilled and not fried, as is the usual custom in Pakistan.

To loose weight:

- If you adopt guidelines for Cholesterol reduction, you will automatically reduce the intake of calories and reduce weight. *In addition*
- eat more of fresh fruits and vegetables
- avoid sugar and food items which contain sugar (mithai, kheer, halva, puddings, cakes and pastries)

Weight reduction requires a balanced cut down of the amount of food consumed, a drastic reduction may lead to ill health. For details on diet see the Heartfile Public Information Pamphlets on "Cholesterol and Your Heart" and "Food and Your Heart"

Advise on sugar

If you do not suffer from Diabetes and are not overweight, there is no particular need for you to reduce your sugar intake as far as "Heart Attack prevention" is concerned. However do not forget that excessive consumption can lead to gain in weight and increase the chance of developing Diabetes, which predisposes to a Heart Attack.

Advise on salt

Remember that most of us take much more salt than we need, mostly in prepared foods as well as by adding it during cooking or at the table. The standard Pakistani practise of eating salt rich "Salan" with lots of meat which is rich in salt itself has to be modified in terms of putting less salt in the daily "Handi". Salads should be eaten preferably without salt and the practise of eating pickles and chutney is to be discouraged because of their high salt content, unless they are prepared salt free. Reducing your salt is particularly important if your Blood Pressure is raised. In most cases of mildly high Blood Pressure lowering the amount of salt in the diet alone, controls the Blood Pressure without medicines.

Exercise

The right type of exercise has a protective effect on the heart. The amount of exercise that you can do depends on your age, your previous level of physical activity, the associated illnesses, disabilities and the medicines you are on.

For exercise to condition the heart it has to be sustained, brisk and regular. The type of exercise useful for the heart is "aerobic" exercise, examples of which are brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming and racquet games. For these to be effective they have to be done for about 30 minutes, 3-4 times a week and need to be sufficiently intensive to make you slightly breathless. On the other hand light exercise like walking at a steady pace,

housework and stretch exercises do not condition the heart. Exercises that are actually harmful for the heart and thus not recommended are "Isometric" exercises, examples of which are weight lifting, boxing, "kushti" and "kabbadi".

You must never exercise after a meal and always cater to the weather outside. Gradually, build up your exercise and always stop as soon as you get chest pain, are overly out of breath or experience any unexpected symptom and seek medical help.

Knowing the benefits of regular physical activity it is advisable to make exercise a part of your daily routine, for example going to work on a bicycle rather than on the bus or in the car and indulging in a walk rather than watching the evening television. Most important of all is the realisation that it is your own health and your own heart and the effort is always worthwhile.

Warning: *These recommendations are for people with no heart disease and with treated heart disease.*

Control of Blood Pressure

Raised Blood Pressure is a silent killer. It is not only the major risk factor for causing Angina and Heart Attack but also causes stroke, kidney and eye diseases. According to a recent survey in Pakistan 1 in 3 people above the age of 45 years suffer from high Blood Pressure! To make matters worse 70% people with high Blood Pressure do not know that they are actually suffering from it. It is evident that high Blood Pressure is very common. You must always look for an opportunity to have your Blood Pressure checked, especially if there is a family history of the same, if you have other risk factors and certainly if you are over the age of 45. The modern treatment of high Blood Pressure is not only very effective but is also very safe!

For details on high Blood Pressure, see the Heartfile public Information Pamphlet on "All about high Blood Pressure"

Control of Diabetes

According to a research survey in Pakistan 12% of the population above 45 years of age suffers from Diabetes. Diabetes causes damage to the blood vessels of the heart, increasing the process of fat deposition and coagulation of blood in them. As a result of this Diabetics are more prone to developing Heart Attacks. Diabetes also poses a special problem in people suffering from heart disease, as some Diabetic patients do not have any indication of pain when they suffer from a Heart Attack. Control of Diabetes is very important, even more so if you have heart disease.

The Stress factor

Stress is an emotional reaction to events or circumstances. The body handles a certain amount of stress in your daily life but too much stress can cause problems. In relation to the heart stress causes a rise in the heart rate, rise in Blood Pressure and at times, constriction of the blood vessels to the heart. On a regular basis these can cause irreversible changes and that is how stress is a major risk factor for Angina and Heart Attacks. Recognise the symptoms of Stress and tension and learn to avoid them by making adjustments in your life.

Prevention by Medication

If you are at a particularly high risk of developing a Heart Attack, your doctor may treat you with medicines, such as those used to reduce the blood Cholesterol level or high Blood Pressure or prevent clotting of blood. Only your doctor can decide about the need to use these medicines. Aspirin and medications called "Beta blockers" and "ACE Inhibitors" are particularly useful for those who have already had a Heart Attack, as they reduce the chance of a further attack (Secondary prevention). Aspirin however may also protect against a first Heart Attack

(Primary prevention). Check with your doctor before taking it regularly as it is not free of side effects.

Other risk factors:

There is now new information accumulating which points towards other (emerging) risk factors being important. Active research is going on in this area.

Remember that a Heart Attack, can be preventable to some extent. It is the recognition of "risk factors" and their subsequent modification that may save you from this dreaded disease.

The guidelines described in this booklet are meant for healthy adults and are not intended as a substitute for the advice your doctor may give you based on his knowledge of your particular illness.

Heartfile *Public Information Pamphlets*

No 1 - Prevent a Heart Attack

No 2 - Symptoms of Heart Disease

No 3 - All About high Blood pressure

No 4 - Smoking and Your Heart

No 5 - Cholesterol and Your Heart

No 6 - Food and Your Heart

Heart disease is one of the biggest killers' world-wide, with a particularly high prevalence in the IndoPak Subcontinent. Heartfile is a non-profit organisation fighting heart disease in Pakistan and aims to extend this service to the rest of the developing world. We rely entirely on voluntary contributions to carry out our work and your help in this connection will be greatly appreciated.

Public Information Pamphlets

A CIDA funded project

One Park Road, Chak Shahzad, Islamabad, Pakistan:

Tel: ++92 51 224 3580: Fax: ++92 51 2240 773

Web <http://heartfile.org> E-mail: info@heartfile.org

Copyright© Heartfile