



## *The Power of Personal Choice in Preventing and Reversing Heart Disease*

**By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar M.D.**

Heart disease is the nation's number one killer, causing more deaths than all cancers combined. Women account for 51% of all cardiac deaths per year in the U.S. It is the leading cause of death in women age 20 and greater. The fastest growing users of prescription drugs for heart disease are men and women, ages 29 to 44. Among women, there is no improvement in mortality. In fact, the mortality rate has been rising over the past ten years. Typically men are taken more seriously when they present with chest pain to a physician or emergency room, increasing their chances of survival from a heart attack.

The primary risk factors for heart disease are

- hypertension
- diabetes
- obesity
- cigarette smoking
- elevated cholesterol
- inactivity
- depression
- heredity
- age over 50

In women, low HDL rather than high LDL cholesterol, appears to make them more vulnerable to heart disease. In men, high LDL is correlated with heart disease. Cholesterol is a secondary risk factor for heart disease in both men and women. This means that high cholesterol alone is not predictive of cardiac risk. Hypertension has long been recognized as the leading contributor to cardiovascular disease, including stroke and heart attacks. Hypertensive individuals are two to three times more likely to develop heart disease than those with normal blood pressures.

**Stress** is an underestimated risk factor that can influence **all the other risk factors** and amplify them. **Stress is the leading risk factor for heart disease and a leading cause of hypertension.**

The mechanism of how stress causes heart disease is fairly simple. Stress can be experienced in the form of depression, anxiety, feelings of being overwhelmed or traumatized. These feelings increase the level of stress hormones in the body. The hormone surges create small tears in the inner lining of coronary arteries and the body then mobilizes platelets to heal them. When platelets attempt to heal these tears, they create sticky areas in the inner lining of the arteries, making it easy for cholesterol plaque to stick to these areas. This is the beginning of a cholesterol plaque. If stress hormones are released in large surges, they can cause the coronary arteries to spasm, causing the plaque to break off. If this occurs, the delivery of oxygen to the area of heart muscle that the artery supplies is cut off and dies. This is defined as a 'heart attack'.

Another cause of the formation of a plaque in the coronary artery is inflammation. If the foods we eat are 'inflammatory' foods such as sugar, white flour, red meat, dairy and synthetic sugars and processed foods, our body becomes inflamed. In fact, the cause of most of our inflammatory diseases and chronic illnesses has been found to be the consumption of inflammatory foods. Cancer and heart disease are now known to be diseases of inflammation. Our dietary choices can play a very significant role in decreasing inflammation and preventing the majority of diseases from which we suffer.

Dr.'s Dean Ornish and Caldwell Esselstyn, Jr. have shown that a plant based diet significantly reduces a person's risk for heart disease **and it can reverse already existing heart disease within 6 weeks!**

In my medical practice, I promote a plant based diet with the addition of Omega -3 fish oil. The combination of these can not only prevent and reverse heart disease, but can significantly lower cholesterol without prescription drugs like statins. In postmenopausal women, the side effects of statins such as muscle pain are more prevalent than in men, and many are unable to take them for lowering cholesterol.

The key factors in heart disease prevention are an intention that one can make and follow through with changes in behavior and food choices. These changes can begin the process of healing the heart and reversing heart disease that may be present. Over the past 21 years of medical practice, I have found that not only do symptoms of heart disease, such as chest pain, exercise intolerance, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression, anxiety and ankle swelling decrease but, a person's sense of well-being and exuberance increases. The simple lifestyle changes that one can choose to incorporate to prevent and reverse heart disease are:

- A predominantly plant based diet.
- At least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise 6 days per week
- Drinking 6 to 8 oz. of water per day
- 2000mg or more of Omega-3 fish oil containing 600mg of DHA
- At least one cup of green tea per day
- A daily meditative practice for stress reduction and relaxation
- Networking and connecting with supportive friends and releasing unsupportive people in one's life
- Doing what one loves and loving what one does
- Living mindfully
- Making 'self-care' a priority

Not only do we need to support our physical heart, we need to support our energetic heart. When we live in this way and make more choices from a place of self-love, we can heal our physiology in addition to preventing future disease. Healthy choices cause the release of hormones in the body that support health and well-being.

What we need more in our world is to care for each other and expect and participate in healthy relationships. Our discernment in making healthy choices is an important level of self-advocacy from which we need to live. When we live consciously from a place of health, we mentor others and affect their health in positive ways. We affect the health of our community. We need to remember the role and power that personal example plays in our world. Self-advocacy helps us make healthy choices and empowers others to do the same. This is a conscious way that we can choose to restore health to ourselves and our communities.

It's even more important to focus on heart health during the holiday season. Heart disease is a PREVENTABLE and REVERSIBLE condition. It is a matter of personal choice.

**©Dec 2014 Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, MD is board certified in Internal Medicine and the founder and Medical Director of The Ommani Center for Integrative Medicine in Pewaukee. She has been in practice for more than 20 years with a focus on heart disease, women's health and bio-identical hormones. The second edition of her book, *Becoming Real: Reclaiming Your Health in Midlife*, was published in 2014 and is available at the Ommani Center bookstore [www.ommanicenter.com](http://www.ommanicenter.com) or through Amazon.com in Kindle and paperback.**