

Healthy Happy Hearts!



Cardiovascular Disease is still one of the major medical problems we face in Australia. In simple terms, besides hereditary factors, your sex and your age, cardiovascular disease is mainly a disease of **lifestyle**. This means that there is something we can do ourselves to reduce our risk of getting Cardiovascular Disease.

There are a number of risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease, which can be modified by lifestyle changes. These include: smoking, being too sedentary, poor diet, being overweight, having high blood LDL cholesterol or fat, poorly controlled diabetes, poorly managed inflammatory disease, and high blood pressure. There is the possibility that psychological factors such as stress, isolation, hostility, low self esteem and depression, may also contribute to the problem.

Back in the 1990's, cardiologist Dr Dean Ornish performed some landmark research, where he was able to actually **reverse** coronary heart disease through lifestyle change, **based largely on Yoga**. Prior to this research it was thought only surgery and medications could actually help.

Since then, Dr Satish Sivasankaran, from Yale University found that yoga and meditation 3 times a week can improve heart disease risk by improving blood vessel function, reducing heart rate and blood pressure. His program on mostly older males included 40 minutes of postural yoga, 20 minutes of deep relaxation, 15 minutes of yoga breathing, and 15 minutes of meditation.

An extensive review in 2004 by Dr Innes & co-workers found evidence from a large number of studies, that yoga can be helpful for preventing and managing cardiovascular disease

So what is Heart Disease?

Cardiovascular disease is associated with a **build up of plaques, made up of fat and cholesterol**, in the lining of the blood vessels. In Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) specifically this build up of plaque occurs in coronary arteries. Plaques usually occur in blood vessels where trauma has occurred, smoking being one of the causes of this trauma. Plaques can build up and restrict blood flow, which can cause problems on exertion: heart pain or leg pain, according to which artery is involved. Recent research has shown that **chronic inflammation** in our system can lead to the plaques breaking down, causing them to move and block smaller arteries. When this occurs in the heart, we call this a heart attack, as the heart muscle supplied by the blocked artery becomes starved of oxygen, and painful, and can die if the blood supply is not restored. Blood vessels can also become blocked by platelets in the blood clotting together, or by blood vessel spasms. These problems often occur more in women.



What can you do to become Heart Smart?

- The most important thing you can do is have regular medical checks to see if you have any risk factors or cardiovascular problems, and deal with them appropriately, as advised by your doctor or health professional.
- The Heart Foundation advises that your heart needs care for life. A healthy heart is about enjoying a healthy lifestyle and making this part of your everyday life. It is also about taking positive steps to reduce risk factors. These include:
 - Enjoy Healthy Eating with a majority of plant based foods, and less saturated fats/trans fatty acids
 - Be active every day, aiming for at least 30 or more minutes of moderate activity
 - Be smoke free
 - Healthy weight management
 - Manage your blood pressure

- Maintain mental and social wellbeing

• If you are still smoking, there's a good chance you are addicted chemically or psychologically. So don't give yourself a hard time; recognise this fact that smoking is not good, and actively aim to give up smoking, and seek lots of help and support, from the Quitline (call 13 1848) and health professionals. Sometimes it can be helpful to find something positive to replace smoking.

• Strategies to deal with chronic inflammation may also be helpful, including low dose aspirin (which also prevents blood clotting), having a low inflammatory diet, such as lots of fruit and vegetables, and include omega 3 fatty acids in your diet such as Flax seed or fish oils.

• Dr Dean Ornish has also described 4 YOGIC like principles to having a healthy HAPPY heart.

- Mindful Eating

Like for the Heart Foundation, eat more plant based foods, eat less meat, and most importantly watch **how** you eat, not just what you eat.

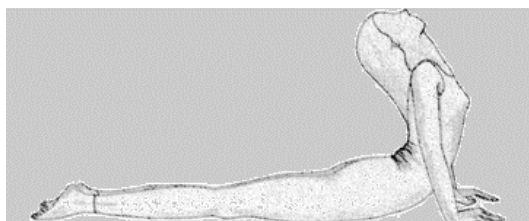
- Mindful Movement

Enjoy regular moderate physical activity, such as brisk walking.

Yoga for the Heart: a practice to open the coronary arteries, improve blood vessel control, reduce blood pressure, and calm the mind. Practise at least 3 times per week, holding the postures for at least 5 breaths. Doesn't need to take longer than 20 to 30 minutes. Try the following practices:

- Mountain with back extension
- Cobra
- Full Locust
- Wind Relieving
- Legs Up Wall (or Shoulder stand)
- Fish
- Western stretch
- Half Spinal Twist
- Relaxation
- Seated in Cross Sit for Heart Opening Breathing
- Heart Meditation

Do with care. Cause no strain or pain. Seek medical advice before doing if you have a heart problem, medical problem or are pregnant. Come to class to learn how to do this wonderful sequence safely.



- Mending the mind, releasing stress

Include daily relaxation, and meditation, for at least 10 to 20 minutes.

- Social Support – connecting to others.

Improve your communication with your friends and family in a manner that better enhances Love and Intimacy. Identify and know what you are really feeling, not what you believe you ought to feel. Part of the value of quieting your mind with meditation or prayer is that it can help you pay greater attention to what you're really feeling. Paying attention to what you're really feeling can be a clue to what another person is feeling. Hearts tend to resonate with each other. When you tell another person what you're feeling, that is a true experience by definition.

Healing may often occur even when curing is not possible. We can move closer to wholeness even when the physical illness does not improve. In the process of healing, you reach a place of wholeness and deep inner peace from which you can deal with illness with much less fear and suffering and much greater clarity and compassion.