

Look after the heart of the man in your life

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Heart disease is the second highest killer of men in Hong Kong after cancer, killing more than 3,400 men in 2009, according to the Department of Health. Of these, around 95 per cent were men aged over 45 years old, with coronary heart disease being the major cause of death.

Heart patients usually have prolonged high readings of cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar levels, and this, in conjunction with limited physical exercise, may lead to conditions such as arterial stenosis, sclerosis and ultimately myocardial infarction.

It is the traditional role of men as the family breadwinner, working long hour, often in high-pressure environments, that puts them more at risk to heart attack than women. Add to this a culture of frequently dining out, excessive smoking and drinking, and a lack of physical checkups, the risk is even higher.

Today is a good time to show fathers, husbands and all your male relatives just how much you care about them and their hearts by encouraging them to have regular cardiac checkups.

Warning signs that go unnoticed

One of the major risk factors leading to coronary heart disease is the balance of good and bad cholesterol levels. With too much “bad cholesterol” (LDL cholesterol) and too little “good cholesterol” (HDL cholesterol) inside the body, the accumulation of excess bad cholesterol may cause atherosclerosis - a gradual narrowing of the blood vessels.

Alternately, if lipid levels remain high, circulation will slow and the blood will become viscous. With the high blood sugar levels, it indicates a high risk of coronary heart disease. However, it carries no obvious outward symptom and often goes unnoticed until blood vessels have suffered prolonged damage and embolism. At this late stage treatment becomes more difficult and the impact on health is much greater.

Regular Cardiac Check-ups Protect Your Heart

Specialists in cardiology recommend regular cardiac check-ups for men, especially for those who are over-weight. A check-up will reveal the condition of the heart and discover the early hidden signs of coronary heart disease so that immediate treatment can be implemented to prevent the situation from worsening. Routine cardiac assessment includes evaluation of blood pressure, blood tests and electrocardiogram (ECG) results.

The electrocardiogram (ECG) test can take two forms: a resting ECG and a stress test. Resting ECG is undertaken with the patient lying motionless in bed, allowing doctors to examine the symptoms of acute myocardial infarction or abnormalities such as irregular heart beats. The stress test is used to check the possibility of coronary heart diseases and involves patients exercising under a doctor's guidance while their ECG levels are recorded for analysis.

Angiocardiology is another method used to investigate the degree of cardiovascular blood flow by means of an X-ray machine. Among non-invasive tests, computer coronary angiograph is the most accurate method of detecting coronary heart disease. It can assess the condition of the coronary wall and lumen accurately and determine the extent of conditions like coronary calcification and stenosis.

Hong Kong men tend to be introverted and seldom discuss their health with their family. Take the opportunity to broach the subject of heart health with fathers and grandfathers and encourage them to have a comprehensive cardiac assessment.

The above information is provided for your reference only. Should you have any enquires, please refer to your doctor.