

Vail Daily

February is National Heart Health Month

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February is national heart health month, fitting since Valentine's Day signifies love, relationships, family and the heart. With all this celebration centering on the heart I would like to discuss how we can take better care of your heart given that cardiovascular disease remains the No. 1 killer in U.S. adults. Heart disease should be a concern no matter what your age, especially given that I even see high blood pressure, high cholesterol and atherosclerosis in children. Yet, the majority of cardiovascular disease is preventable and treatable with dietary changes, physical activity and targeted nutritional supplementation. Lifestyle interventions, along with supplementation, have a broader benefit than drugs because they address the dysfunction that underlie chronic disease rather than just treat the symptoms. In treating cardiovascular disease everyone is different since there are many causes such as stress, insulin resistance, inflammation and obesity etc. This is why an individual approach is best. There are a few supplements that I would like to discuss that can protect an individual from heart disease.

Fish oil is packed with omega 3 fatty acids. The EPA and DHA in fish oil work with the cellular membranes, decreasing inflammation in the cells that cause most cardiovascular disease. Fish oil can reduce blood pressure, lower triglycerides, improve insulin resistance, prevent and treat metabolic syndrome and reduce arrhythmia. The key is taking a good quality fish oil with no PCB's, lead or mercury because if you take poor quality fish oil this can actually cause heart disease. Manufacturers should be able to prove product purity. A good dose would be 2 to 4 grams a day.

Coenzyme Q10 (COQ10) is an antioxidant that naturally occurs in the cell mitochondria. Coenzyme Q10 works by oxygenating the heart. People with high cholesterol and congestive heart failure generally have low coenzyme Q10 levels. A 2007 study published in the American Journal of Cardiology showed that statins, the drugs frequently prescribed for high cholesterol, deplete the body's COQ10 stores so supplementation is needed to restore these levels. Coenzyme Q10 combats cardiovascular disease by acting as an antioxidant. It has natural blood thinning effects and oxygenates the heart. I especially like COQ10 at this altitude because there is less oxygen saturation here in Vail. A good dose would be 100 to 200 milligrams a day.

Vitamin D is beneficial for healthy bones, immunity, preventing cancer and is crucial for a healthy heart. Vitamin D is one of the most frequently deficient vitamins and one of the most important nutrients for cardiovascular health. A study published in October 2010 in the American Journal of Cardiology linked the widespread prevalence of vitamin D deficiency to high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, myocardial infarction and other conditions. Researchers at Salt Lake City's Heart Institute in 2009 found that of 28,000 adults over the age of 50 with no history of heart disease and low vitamin D levels, 77 percent were more likely to die, 45 percent were more likely to develop coronary artery disease, 78 percent were more likely to have a stroke than patients with normal vitamin D levels. Too little vitamin D can increase the risk of calcium build up in the arteries, which can lead to atherosclerosis and potentially a heart attack or stroke. I recommend getting your vitamin D 25-hydroxy (D3) levels checked and then getting on an appropriate dose. I recommend between 1,000 to 2,000 milligrams and higher if you're deficient.

I don't want to forget about dark chocolate (meaning 60 to 70 percent cocoa beans) and its benefits for the heart. Dark chocolate is an antioxidant and prevents our cells from free radical damage. It is loaded with flavonoids, which have antiinflammatory effects. Chocolate can help lower the bad cholesterol (LDL) and blood pressure. So give the gift of dark chocolate for Valentine's or any other holiday. You only need small amounts to impact your health.

Preventing heart disease is all about knowing your numbers such as your cholesterol, blood pressure, body mass index, vitamin D levels, homocysteine, c-reactive protein, glucose and sed rate. February is a good time to pay

attention to your heart. If you are having chest pain, shortness of breath, arrhythmia or trouble breathing, get checked out by your doctor. Health is about paying attention to your body; do not ignore your symptoms.

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