

American Heart Month

Prevention can help fight heart attacks, stroke

By Maj. Brenda Wilson
60th Medical Operations Squadron

TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — Do you always wait until your car has a problem before you bring it in for maintenance? If you do, that could be costly. And if you take this approach to checking your cholesterol, you may be waiting for a heart attack, stroke or other health issues.

According to the American Heart Association, you should have your cholesterol checked every five years, beginning at age 18.

With February being American Heart Month, it is a good time to call your doctor to have your cholesterol level checked and blood pressure taken. It could prevent you from needing a more costly "tune-up" in the future.

But what is this cholesterol that doctors say can do so much damage?

Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in the body's cells and in the blood stream. The body uses cholesterol to make hormones and vitamin D, build cell walls and protect cells, digest food, and insulate and help protect nerves.

About 75 percent of cholesterol is made in the liver. The other 25 percent is found in foods of animal origin, such as beef, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products. Most Americans eat about 350 to 450 milligrams a day. The recommended daily intake is 300 milligrams a day.

Elevated levels of cholesterol is the number one risk factor for coronary heart disease. The excess cholesterol narrows and blocks arteries leading to

heart attacks or strokes.

Good cholesterol vs. bad cholesterol

Cholesterol and other fats attach themselves to proteins called lipoproteins in order to move through the blood stream. Although there are several kinds of lipoproteins, the two best known are the "bad" low-density lipoproteins and the "good" high-density lipoproteins. LDLs transport 75 percent of the blood's cholesterol to the body's cells.

When an oversupply occurs, LDLs begin to deposit the excess onto the walls of arteries where it forms layers of waxy plaque. The buildup of this plaque blocks the arteries and reduces blood flow to the heart muscle. This process is called atherosclerosis and is the major cause of heart disease.

One role of the HDLs is to remove the cholesterol from the walls of the arteries and return them to the liver. Therefore, high levels of HDLs are as important as low levels of LDLs.

Reduce your cholesterol levels

This process of building up cholesterol is not permanent and can be reversed if people make a few simple dietary changes.

- Eat less than 300 milligrams of dietary cholesterol each day.

- Less than 30 percent of your total daily calories should come from fat. The average American diet is about 35 to 40 percent fat.

- Less than 10 percent of the fat intake should come from saturated fat; 15 to 20 percent of the average American's calories come from saturated fat. Saturated fat stimulates the production of cholesterol.

- Choose products that contain polyunsaturated and mono-unsaturated fats such as corn, olive, safflower, canola, soybean and sunflower oil instead of those containing saturated fats such as coconut or palm oil.

- Use low-fat or skim dairy products instead of those with whole milk. Check the labels on products before you buy them.

- Choose foods high in complex carbohydrates (fiber and starch). A healthy diet should contain grains, fresh fruit and vegetables and small portions of lean meat, chicken and fish.

- Adjust your caloric intake to achieve or maintain desirable weight.

Healthy lifestyle includes exercising and no smoking. Eating properly is only one aspect of lowering cholesterol. It also takes a healthy lifestyle that includes exercise. Regular aerobic exercise three to five times a week for 20 to 30 minutes is one of the best ways to raise the good HDL levels and lower total cholesterol.

Frequent exercise will also help control your weight. As your weight goes up, your HDL levels tend to drop. By losing weight, you can reverse this process by raising HDLs and lowering LDLs.

Stopping the smoking habit helps, too. One of the reasons smoking increases the risk of heart attacks is because smoking can reduce HDL levels. By quitting cigarettes, you can raise your HDL and decrease your chances of a heart attack.

For more information on health-related issues, call the Health and Wellness Center at 963-4007. (AMCNS)

Fun for all: Youth Center sports program is on a roll

By Don MacArthur
Youth Center

What's there to do at the Youth Center?

Youth basketball, dance, gymnastics, karate, tutoring, fantasy football, Little League baseball and lifeguard classes are just a few of the activities available. The Youth Center offers numerous programs every day of the week and is really "a great place for kids to go."

The Youth Center sponsored the Waves, a soccer team made up of 11-12 year-old boys and girls who recently won the Southern District championship in the Mite Division.

"They played up to their potential," said Rick Lytton, who coached the team with Steve Paul. "They played well all year - they attacked the goal well and were strong at midfield."

The Waves fought their way through the championship tournament and ended up facing Pepperhill for the title, against whom they had played to a tie during the regular season.

"It was only fitting we got to play them in the championship," Lytton said. The Waves beat Pepperhill, 1-0.

The 13-15-year-old soccer team sponsored by the Youth Center also won their division championship by defeating St. Andrews. They, too, had played to a tie during the regular season.

In basketball, 26 teams play weekly in a variety of competitive age groups. Currently, three teams are undefeated as they prepare for post season play and jamborees in all age groups.

The holiday break provided eight youths the opportunity to certify as American Red Cross lifeguards. Heated water was provided by McDonnell Enterprises at Quail Arbor V swimming pool.

Youth baseball and softball registration is now in progress. Last season, the Youth center fielded its first girls softball team in seven years. This year, depending on pre-registration prior to the scheduled meetings, we hope to have two teams: one in the 9-10 age division and one in the 11-12 division. Coaches and volunteers for baseball can meet at the Youth Center Feb. 18 at 5 p.m. Certification for coaches is Feb. 19 at 8 a.m.

For more information, call 963-5684.



courtesy photo

Coach Jim Thomas talks strategy with his "Tarheels," a basketball team currently undefeated in the 11-12-year-old division.

Sports Line

Armed Forces Night

The South Carolina Stingrays honor the military tonight with their annual Armed Forces Night at the North Charleston Coliseum. The Rays face the Charlotte Checkers. Game time is set for 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available for only \$6 (regular price is \$9) at the Outdoor Recreation Center, or just show your military ID while purchasing a ticket to enjoy the discount rate. Tickets are available to active duty members, Reservists, retirees and family members. Show your ID at the game, and you can get an Armed Forces value meal (hot dog and small soda) for only \$3.

HAWC News

The Health and Wellness Center will offer a LEARN class (Lifestyle, Exercise, Attitude, Relationships, Nutrition) Feb. 28 at 6 p.m.

Quit Smoking in the Year 2000. The HAWC is offering a Tobacco Cessation class Feb. 15 at 1 p.m. or 5 p.m.

You can still sign up at the HAWC Monday - Thursday for a cholesterol screening on Friday.

For more information, call the HAWC at 963-4007.