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Stats on Heart Disease and Stroke

The American Heart Association recently published the latest statistics on cardiovascular disease (1); that can include everything from heart attack, stroke, hypertension, congestive heart failure, and more. The document is 222 pages long, but I'll give you a few things that stood out to me. The one thing that you should understand is that for the most part, heart disease is preventable. Some of us got hit with bad genes—my dad died at 41, so I'm in that group—but attaining and then maintaining an ideal lifestyle really lowers your risk. Let's take a look.

Stats

The number of people with cardiovascular disease in the USA is 82,600,000; that's 37% of all males and 35% of all women. Next time you're sitting in a movie theatre or church or stadium, look to the right, the look to the left. One of the three of you has some form of cardiovascular disease. Almost half the people with CVD are over 60. This year, there will be about eight million heart attacks and seven million strokes. Of all those with CVD, about 10% will die of it this year.

Ideal Health Behaviors

The writing group identified a list of ideal health behaviors, and the more of these you attain, the less your risk of getting CVD. Here's the list of health behaviors and ideal status for each. (You can see the entire chart, including the metrics for children and an explanation of the Healthy Diet Score, by clicking here or going to the Health Info page at drchet.com and choosing AHA 2020 Goals.)

- Current smoking:** Never smoked or quit more than a year ago
- BMI:** Less than 25
- Physical activity:** 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise or 75 minutes per week of vigorous exercise
- Healthy Diet Score:** 4 to 5
- Total cholesterol:** Less than 200 mg/dl
- Blood pressure:** Less than 120 systolic and less than 80 diastolic
- Fasting glucose:** Less than 100 mg/dl

The more of these metrics that you can get into the ideal range, the lower your risk of getting CVD. How low? If you can get to four Ideal Health Behaviors, it drops your risk to less than 5%—it doesn't grant you immunity from CVD, but it really lowers the risk. Especially if you got smacked by the genetic stick as I did, that can really be the difference between a long life and an early death.

The question is how many people are actually achieving four Ideal Health Behaviors? If you're over 40, only 7.3% get to four. But even the 20-39 year old age-group, only 27.5% reached four Ideal health Behaviors.

The Bottom Line

Really—7.3%? That's a little more than one out of 14.

We can do better. We have to do better. Not just because it's good for our health—it is, but these are the metrics that insurance companies examine to determine the cost of health insurance and in some cases, whether you'll be insured at all. You don't have to achieve them all once, but work at them every day.

What behavior or behaviors would have the biggest impact? Getting to a normal BMI and exercise; those two will affect every other metric on the list. But as I've said before, quitting smoking may be the biggest improvement you can make in your health. And really, would it kill you to eat a healthier diet? It all comes down to one thing:

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

Reference: <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/125/1/e2>.

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