

THE HEALTH NUGGET



FEBRUARY 2009

BY RISE RAFFERTY

Escaping the Big One

Growing up in earthquake territory, I was keenly aware that while no one knew when, everyone anticipated “the big one.” Earthquake drills in school, tremors, and even actual midnight earthquakes kept the apprehension alive. I always drove a little faster over the freeway bypass that dropped right over the San Andreas fault.

Being the leading cause of death in the United States for men and women, cardiovascular disease and its symptomatic heart attack has placed a general dread on the population. While there are often preceding ‘tremors’ the big one can strike without warning. More than half a million people who suffer heart attacks every year in this country never even make it to the hospital. They die suddenly—at home, at work, or at play—often without warning, before any treatment can be started. The only way to deal with sudden cardiac death is to prevent it, and at the moment that is best done by eliminating the major risk factors

Drugs, like statins, are often regarded as the magic bullet. But no single thing, no one pill, can prevent heart disease. For the typical adult, multiple factors cause arterial disease. They have been portrayed as daggers aimed at the heart. Excess insulin, low HDL, excess LDL, high glucose, excess triglycerides, high blood pressure, excess homocysteine, elevated cholesterol levels, and dietary factors such as excess salt intake are more commonly understood daggers or risk factors. But there are other variables that if not addressed, can still leave an individual vulnerable. Each is considered an independent risk factor and can trigger a heart attack, yet their effect is cumulative.

Low Blood EPA/DHA

EPA and DHA are omega-3 fatty acids found in flax, fish, walnuts, and certain green vegetables. Americans typically do not ingest enough omega-3’s. The American Heart Association has concluded that these fatty acids help prevent heart attacks, sudden cardiac death, strokes, and coronary artery disease.¹ They accomplish this by reducing LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, triglyceride levels, significantly lowering blood pressure in those with hypertension, inhibiting the development of plaque and blood clots, dramatically reducing the risk of death, subsequent heart attacks, stroke, and inflammation.²

Elevated C-reactive protein

C-reactive protein (CRP) is a protein that increases during systemic inflammation. According to Dr. Ron Rothenberg, a specialist in preventive and regenerative medicine, testing CRP levels is considered to be “the best predictor of who’s going to have a heart attack, and much more so than testing for LDL cholesterol.”³ He identifies heart disease as an inflammatory state.

Found in the skin of dark grapes, resveratrol “turns off . . . inflammation.”⁴ Dr. Rothenberg, is very enthusiastic about resveratrol supplements with its ability to prevent age-related decline in cardiac function. Pomegranate juice is another source of this powerful heart protector.⁵

Unfortunately our diet typically leads to an inflammatory state. The population has been educated to exchange sources of saturated fat for

polyunsaturated oils. However, brain surgeon and neuroscientist, Dr. Russell Blaylock exposes the danger of this. He states that the very oils we are referred to as heart healthy are contributing significantly to atherosclerosis. For example, "canola oil is a mixture of omega-3 and omega-6 but has been shown to promote cancer and, because it is easily oxidized, could promote atherosclerosis."⁶ Oxidized oil leads to inflammation that damages the arterial wall. This is considered the major mechanism for formation of atherosclerotic plaques and eventual blockage of blood vessels by blood clots. "The most abundant oxidized oil in the wall of atherosclerotic blood vessels is omega-6 oil and NOT CHOLESTEROL!"⁷

Nitric oxide deficit

Nitric oxide promotes relaxation of the smooth muscle cells lining blood vessels and is a key chemical in keeping the coronary arteries healthy. Supplementation with the hormone DHEA has been observed to improve blood markers of nitric oxide in men.

Pomegranate juice has been found to be as effective as drugs in its ability to lower blood pressure, reverse arterial wall build-up of atherosclerotic plaque, and modulate nitric oxide activity.

Low free testosterone

Low testosterone levels are associated with a high risk for cardiovascular disease in both men and women. It has been observed that once hormonal balance is restored, both HDL to LDL ratio and high cholesterol are normalized. In a large European study, "the risk of death from cardiovascular causes was 47% lower for men with the highest level of testosterone."⁸ Additionally, men with the highest testosterone levels have less of all types of cancer.⁹ Being the largest muscle in the body, the heart has more testosterone receptor sites than any other muscle. Optimal testosterone levels protect men from heart attacks.



The bioavailability of a substance refers to the amount of testosterone that can reach the cell. Testing for testosterone levels, determining how much is available to the cells, and pursuing bioidentical hormone replacement if necessary are smart steps in removing this potential tremor instigator.

Low vitamin K and vitamin D

Reported in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, men with deficient vitamin D levels "had a 2.42 times greater risk of heart attack than men with sufficient levels, (>30 ng/mL)."¹⁰

"In a huge European human clinical trial (The Rotterdam Study), doctors evaluated vitamin K intake of 4807 subjects over a 7-10 year period. After adjusting for other risk factors, coronary heart disease risk was reduced with increased intake of vitamin K2. Those who consumed the most vitamin K2 had a 57% reduction in cardiac disease compared to those who consumed the least K2."¹¹ Vitamin K2 is a highly absorbable form of vitamin K.

Preventing the big one is obviously not as simplistic as we may have thought. However, restoring youthfulness to our aging hearts is worth the endeavor. "Above all else, guard (protect) your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

1 "Research Summaries: Benefits of Fish Oil with Footnotes." http://www.omega3powder.com/pdfs/research_summaries.pdf.

2 "Omega-3 fatty acids. Overview." University of Maryland Medical Center. <http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/omega-3-000316.htm>.

3 Somers, Suzanne. *Breakthrough*, p. 57. New York: Crown Publishing, 2008.

4 *Ibid*, p. 60.

5 "Substance In Red Wine, Resveratrol, Found To Keep Hearts Young." *ScienceDaily*. University of Wisconsin-Madison (2008, June 8). <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080604074908.htm>.

6 Somers, Suzanne. *Breakthrough*, p. 203. New York: Crown Publishing, 2008.

7 *Ibid*.

8 Smith, Michael. "Low Testosterone Increases Risk of Death." *MedPage Today*. Nov. 26, 2007. <http://www.medpagetoday.com/Cardiology/MyocardialInfarction/7478>

9 Somers, Suzanne. *Breakthrough*, p. 53. New York: Crown Publishing, 2008.

10 Dye, Dana. "Deficient Vitamin D Levels Associated with Increased Heart Attack Risk." *Life Extension*, p. 19. Sept. 2008.

11 The Misunderstood Vitamin. *Life Extension Magazine*. Super Sale 2006. http://www.lef.org/magazine/mag2006/ss2006_report_vitamink_01.htm.