

The Healthy Heart

The heart is the strongest muscle in the human body. As such, it must be properly taken care of because it is essential for living. Poor health habits can lead to permanent heart damage in your child such as heart-related illnesses, high blood pressure, heart attacks, or even strokes. To lessen your child's chances of developing irreversible heart injury, begin teaching them healthy habits starting now. As a parent, you should work on activities that emphasize the critical importance of the heart and its functions. This section provides some simple and fun activities for you and your child. Encourage physical activity such as running, bicycling, or jumping rope to exercise your child's heart. Discourage smoking, excessive build-up of stress, and unhealthy snacks and foods that can thicken arteries and potentially cause bodily harm. Remember that some people are more prone to heart problems than others. Educate yourself and share with your child heart-related problems, such as high blood pressure, that run in your family. Check out the helpful hints for maintaining a healthy weight, eating a nutritious non-salty diet, and activities to keep the heart physically fit.

The Heart and its functions can be taught to children at an early age. Understanding how the body works and how to keep it healthy influences children to make better choices concerning their bodies.

ACTIVITY #1: " How Hard Does Your Heart Beat"

Instruct your child to check his pulse rate while lying down for approximately two minutes in a rest position. Have him record the pulse rate. Next, have your child move to a sitting position and sit for two minutes. Record the pulse rate. Then, have your child recheck the pulse rate and record with a progression of movements: standing, marching in place, running or jumping in place, sitting down again, and lying down again. Discuss the different recorded pulse rates with your child. Explain to him how increased movements affect the heartbeat and pulse.

ACTIVITY #2: " Good to Your Heart Collage"

Have your child cut out a large "heart" from a sheet of paper. Tell him to draw or cut out pictures of activities that strengthen the heart muscle and can reduce blood pressure. Have your child put the large heart up in a place where he can see it and be reminded to participate in physical activity and exercise for at least twenty minutes that day.

ACTIVITY #3: " Strong Heart Activity"

Have your child make a tightly clenched fist. Tell her to pound on a desk/table with her fist at a rate of about 72 beats per minute. Explain to your child that the fist represents the heart muscle, pushing blood out each time it beats. Tell your child that when she participates in physical activities the heart muscle beats faster, exercising the muscle. Ask your child to name some activities that will make her muscle stronger. Next, tell her to make a fist again. This time, tell her to put the other hand around the clenched fist. Have her pound on the desk again, this time slower and harder. Explain that the heart is not pumping as often, which mean more blood is being pumped through the body, because it is stronger.

ACTIVITY #4: "Clogged Arteries"

Explain that being physically active everyday can make a heart strong. Physical activity helps move fats out of the bloodstream, so that the fats will not stick to the arteries. Show your child a test tube or a twisty drinking straw and tell him that it represents an artery. Take a small spoon of shortening and put it in the tube or straw. Explain to your child that

the shortening represents fat. Tell him that when he eats food s with fats in them like butter, hamburgers, and cheese, the fats go into the blood stream, and into the arteries. Explain to your child that activities that make the heart muscle strong also keep the arteries clear of fat. Help your child name some exercises and physical activities that he can do that will help move fat out of the bloodstream. Some of these activities include walking, running, bicycling, and jumping rope. Tell your child that these activities should be done three times a week, for at least twenty minutes. Try doing theses activities with your child. It will encourage him to be physically active if you are participating too.

Facts About High Blood Pressure

The most common form of high blood pressure is 'primary' or 'essential' hypertension. 90% of people with high blood pressure suffer from 'essential' hypertension. It has no obvious cause. Doctors do know is that some people are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure than others.

High Blood Pressure has no obvious symptoms. Many people HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, BUT DO NOT KNOW. If this is the case, one can not take care of his / her body properly, and may suffer from permanent heart damage at any moment.

CAUSES OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE YOU ARE ABLE TO CONTROL:

- Smoking causes heart and blood vessel disease and is associated with high blood pressure.
- High Salt Intake causes extreme sensitivity in some individuals and causes high blood pressure.
- Oral Contraception such as the pill may cause women to have high blood pressure.
- Excessive Stress and worrying has been related to heart damage.

CAUSES YOU MAY BE UNABLE TO CONTROL:

(Who is more likely to have high blood pressure?)

- **RACE:** African - Americans are more likely than white Americans.
- **AGE:** People over 35 are more likely.
- **HEREDITY:** People with a family

Ways You Can Control & Lower High Blood Pressure

A) EXERCISE 3 TO 4 TIMES A WEEK:

Exercising regularly keeps the heart in shape, and allows the muscle to be ready for strenuous activity should a situation arise. It makes you less likely to suffer from a heart attack and avoids weight gain. Even if you have high blood pressure, don't sit around. Take a walk, run, swim, jump rope, or do jumping jacks.

B) REDUCE STRESS & ANXIETY:

Develop healthy coping strategies for dealing with stress and worries. Activities may include exercising, communicating with someone, or establishing better ways to handle conflict and anger. Set reasonable expectations for your children so they won't develop unhealthy patterns of worrying.

C) DECREASE SALT INTAKE:

Reducing salt intake can lower blood pressure. Don't add extra salt to foods. Find alternative non-salty snacks and food. Use new spices and seasonings to flavor your meals rather than sodium chloride.

D) MAINTAIN NORMAL WEIGHT:

If your child weighs more that he should, try to get him on a better diet. Ask your doctor for advice. Decreasing the amount of food intake and increasing exercise may help. Eat the right foods and stay in shape.

E) DON'T SMOKE:

Smoking increases the stress on your heart and increases damage. The earlier a child may start to smoke, the more likely he will develop high blood pressure. Discourage cigarettes.

history of strokes, heart attacks, or high blood pressure.

- **OBESITY:** People who weigh 30% more than their ideal body weight.
- **GENDER:** Men are more at risk than women, but female risk increases after menopause.

LONG - TERM EFFECTS OF UNCONTROLLED HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE:

- Permanent damage to the heart, brain, and kidneys.
Possible stroke or brain attack. The blood supply to part of brain is blocked resulting in death of brain cells. This may cause paralysis, memory loss, and permanent brain damage.

F) TAKE PRESCRIBED MEDICATION:

Be aware of your family history. Have your family develop routine check ups at your physician. If you are put on medication, stick to the prescription. If you wish to monitor blood pressure at home, home kits are available with instructions on how to use a sphygmomanometer to test blood pressure.

This information comes from the American Heart Association. For more information visit www.americanheart.org.