

# Heart Failure Disease Management Newsletter

summer 2009

## Taking Care of Yourself in Summer Heat

Humidity above 70% and temperatures above 70°F can interfere with your body's natural cooling process. You should avoid exercising in hot and humid conditions. Your body cools itself by sweating, but sweating too much causes you to lose fluid and decreases your blood volume. Decreased blood volume makes your heart work harder to supply blood and oxygen to the working muscles, organs and skin. Your nervous system can not work properly if you lose too much fluid and your body temperature rises. This can also lead to heart and brain damage. If you have a chronic disease such as hypertension, heart failure, diabetes or asthma, speak with your doctor before starting any activity in the heat.

Monitor your fluid level by weighing yourself in the morning after using the bathroom. If you weigh two or more pounds less than normal, you may be dehydrated. Speak with your doctor about your limitations and ask for guidelines for adding fluid if your weight decreases quickly overnight.

Wearing light and comfortable clothes, working or playing in the early morning or late evening, avoiding mid-day sun and heat and taking frequent rest periods will decrease your risks. If you notice any of the symptoms shown to the right, stop your activity and get into an air conditioned, shaded area. Take immediate steps to cool down by applying cool water to your skin and drinking cool, non alcoholic beverages. Seek medical attention at once. Remember: the symptoms of heat stroke and exhaustion can come on quickly and you may not be aware you are experiencing them - they can be deadly. Symptoms to watch for are:



### The symptoms of heat exhaustion

- heavy sweating
- cold, clammy skin
- dizziness or fainting
- a weak and rapid pulse
- muscle cramps
- fast, shallow breathing
- nausea, vomiting or both

### The symptoms of heat stroke

- warm, dry skin with no sweating
- strong and rapid pulse
- confusion and/or unconsciousness
- high fever
- throbbing headaches
- nausea, vomiting or both

Resource: American Heart Association  
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4660>



## Lack of Vitamin D May Increase Heart Disease Risk

Framingham Heart Study Researchers reported in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association* that vitamin D deficiency has been associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. According to Dr. Thomas J Wang, M.D., assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Mass., “The higher risk associated with vitamin D deficiency was particularly evident among individuals with high blood pressure.”

The study involved 1,739 offspring from Framingham Heart Study participants. The participants’ average age was 59. The study found those with blood levels of vitamin D below 15 nanograms per milliliter had twice the risk of a cardiovascular event such as a heart attack, heart failure or stroke in the next five years compared to those with higher levels of vitamin D.

“Low levels of vitamin D are highly prevalent in the United States, especially in areas without

much sunshine,” Dr. Wang said. Lack of sun exposure, pigmented skin that prevents penetration of the sun’s rays and inadequate dietary intake of vitamin D enriched foods are all contributing to vitamin D deficiency.

While the study suggests low levels of vitamin D may increase the risk of heart disease, Dr. Wang cautions “What hasn’t been proven yet is that vitamin D deficiency actually causes increased risk of cardiovascular disease.”

The American Heart Association recommends getting vitamin D from food rather than taking supplements. Foods rich in vitamin D include milk, salmon, mackerel, sardines, and some fortified cereals.

Reference:

*Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association* 01/07/2008

## Limiting Salt

The American Heart Association suggests people with heart failure should keep their salt intake below 2000 milligrams (mg) daily. Salt causes the body to hold onto fluid. Too much fluid makes your heart work harder. You can cut down on salt by replacing it with other flavors like lemon, vinegar, herbs and spices.

Salt can be found everywhere and you can refer to food labels for help in eliminating high salt foods. Talk with your doctor about how much salt intake is best for you. Start slow and refer to the suggestions below:

- Take the salt shaker off the table, do not cook with salt
- Ask your doctor which salt substitutes are safe for you
- Avoid seasonings or sauces that taste salty like soy sauce, steak sauces, Worcestershire sauce, chili, bouillon cubes
- Drain and rinse canned foods
- Avoid canned, processed or dry soups, meats, ham, bacon, sausage, deli items, hot dogs
- Avoid salted nuts and peanut butter, instant cooked cereals
- Avoid salted butter, margarine
- Avoid pretzels, potato chips, olives, cheeses, pickles, salad dressings
- Avoid fast foods

Reference

The American Heart Association

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=336>

## Spicy Buttermilk Dressing

*Recipe courtesy of Alton Brown*

Serves 14 - Two tablespoons per serving

### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup low-fat buttermilk
- 1/2 cup no-salt-added canned garbanzo beans, rinsed and drained
- 1/3 cup canned tomatoes with green chili peppers
- 1/3 cup fat-free plain yogurt
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon dried Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (kosher preferred)

### Directions

In a blender, process all the ingredients for 1 minute, or until smooth. Transfer to a jar with an airtight lid and refrigerate until ready to use.

### Nutrition Analysis (per serving)

Calories: 26	Cholesterol: 1 mg
Fat: 0.5 g	Sodium: 72 mg
Saturated Fat: 0 g	Carbohydrates: 4 g
Trans Fat: 0 g	Sugar: 1 g
Polyunsaturated Fat: 0 g	Fiber: 1 g
Monounsaturated Fat: 0 g	Protein: 2 g

Source:

<http://www.goredforwomen.org/recipes.aspx?id=704>

## How to Talk to Your Doctor

How often have you left a doctor's appointment and wished you had asked a few more questions? Ever left a clinic or urgent care center and realized you didn't remember all the instructions?

Sadly, these are all-too-common occurrences, and ones you can avoid by learning how to talk with your doctor instead of just listening.

Sure, doctors are busy and don't seem to have the time to talk-but you are busy too, right? To make sure you get the most out of your doctor visit, it's important to know how to talk with your doctor. Here are some suggestions from a doctor who sees patients regularly:

1. Write questions and have the topics you'd like to discuss beforehand. When you're prepared, the doctor can focus on answering the questions you have and you can leave with more information.
2. Help keep your doctor on track. A lot of physicians may fall into chit-chat with their patients. That may be great socially, but may not impart much information.
3. Ask for instructions in writing. Generally, doctors try to give patients something in writing to help jog their memory about their conversation. But if they forget to give you an instruction sheet or a hand-written set of information, please ask them to give you something in writing.
4. Internet for conversation – The Internet can be a great place to get additional information. But just because it's on the Internet doesn't mean it's accurate. Ask your doctor for Web sites that have high-quality information.



5. It's OK to stop the doctor for questions. For most doctors, it's very difficult to have a patient who gives them a blank look. In general, they'd much rather a patient stop and ask questions to clarify what was said.
6. Be sure when you arrive at the office, you bring all your current medications – including medications other doctors may have prescribed. That includes herbs, vitamins, and over-the-counter medications that may trigger allergic reactions or drug interactions.
7. Make sure that you bring a pen and paper with you.

Using these simple techniques can make you better at asking questions that can help you in the long run. Simple preparation can lead to better results from your doctor visits.

By: Dr. Tom James, Healthcare Advisor for Humana. Dr. James is board certified in Internal Medicine and in Pediatrics.

## Caffeine and Your Health

Caffeine affects the body in multiple ways. You probably already know too much caffeine can make you jittery or nervous. It can also cause frequent urination which can lead to dehydration. Caffeine's effect on blood pressure is especially troubling.

Researchers at Duke University Medical Center found caffeine exaggerates stress and its effect lasts throughout the day. Four cups of coffee raised blood pressure for many hours. Lead author, James D. Lane, PhD stated "People consuming typical amounts of coffee and caffeinated soft drinks are probably raising their blood pressure by an amount equal to the beneficial reduction seen with antihypertensive drugs."

Coffee, tea, soft drinks, chocolate and some nuts contain caffeine. Moderate caffeine intake (1-2 cups a day) has not been shown to be harmful. If you stop drinking caffeine you may experience withdrawal 12 to 24 hours after your last dose of caffeine. Most people feel anxious, fatigued, drowsy or depressed and may report headache. Caffeine withdrawal can be minimized if you cut back gradually. As with most things, moderation is the best practice.

Resource:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4445>

<http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/news/20020801/is-caffeine-bad-for-your-heart?page=2>



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## **Fish and Omega-3 Fatty Acids Supplements**

The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least two times a week. Fatty fish such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, albacore tuna, and salmon are a good source of protein and don't have the high saturated fat that fatty meat products have. Fatty fish are also high in omega-3 fatty acids.

In 2002, the American Heart Association released a scientific statement "Fish Consumption, Fish Oil, Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Cardiovascular Disease," on the effects of omega-3 fatty acids on heart functions. While research continues on the link between omega-3 fatty acids and cardiovascular disease (disease of the heart and blood vessels), research has shown omega-3 fatty acids:

- Decrease risk of arrhythmias (irregular heart beats)
- Decrease triglyceride levels
- Lower blood pressure (slightly)
- Decrease the growth rate of plaque build up in the arteries

Fish oil supplements are another way to get omega-3 fatty acids. The amount of fish oil or omega-3 fatty acid supplements to take is not clear. Patients taking more than 3 grams of omega-3 fatty acids from capsules should do so only under a physician's care. High intakes can cause excessive bleeding in some people.

The bottom line with omega-3 fatty acid supplements is the same as for any over the counter medication (OTC). Talk to your doctor about the benefits and any pros and cons before you purchase or take them.

Reference: American Heart Association



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