

Drugs and

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MOST PEOPLE don't think of alcohol or cigarettes as drugs, but these can have devastating consequences on the heart. Marijuana and cocaine are drugs, and these can also have devastating consequences on the heart.

Smoking cigarettes and the heart

Inhaling smoke of any kind is dangerous; increasingly the evidence suggests that not only the smoker is affected. Smoking is a filthy way of getting a drug (chemical) into the body. There are many pollutants and carcinogens in cigarette smoke – the American Heart Association notes that there are 4 000 chemicals in cigarette smoke, and no less than 40 of them are carcinogens (cancer causing drugs).

Cigarette smoking increases the risk of heart disease; smoking cigarettes still causes ten times more heart disease than it causes cancer.

People who smoke have an increased level of atherosclerosis in their coronary arteries (the blood vessels which nourish the heart). Atherosclerosis is the build-up of fatty material – called atheroma – which can cause the inside lining of the artery to rupture, leading to a clot.

If a clot forms in a narrowed coronary artery, the artery can get blocked suddenly. This means part of the heart muscle loses its supply of blood and oxygen, resulting in part of the heart muscle being damaged. This is a heart attack, also known as a myocardial infarction – myocardium refers to the heart muscle and infarction refers to the death of a part of it.

A heart attack can cause severe chest pain, but other symptoms include shortness of breath, nausea, heaviness or tightness in the chest, stomach, arms, shoulder or jaw. Some heart attacks only cause a small amount of damage to heart muscle. In these cases, people can recover quite quickly.

However, if a large part of the muscle gets damaged, it may limit the heart's pumping efficiency permanently and may result in death.

When smoking acts with other factors, like hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol, it greatly increases the risk of a heart attack and/or other heart problems.

Alcohol and the heart

Over the past few decades, many studies have been published in medical journals showing that moderate drinking of alcohol may be associated with reduced mortality due to heart disease in some populations. Some researchers have suggested that the benefits may be due to the components in red

the heart

wine, such as flavonoids and other antioxidants.

The linkage reported in many of these studies may be due to other lifestyle factors, rather than alcohol. These factors may include increased physical activity, and a diet high in fruits and vegetables, and lower in saturated fats.

But it is also known that, over time, drinking more than three drinks a day can lead to high blood pressure, heart failure, alcoholic cardiomyopathy (enlarged and weakened heart), cardiac arrhythmias and sudden cardiac death.

Current medical recommendations caution people not to start drinking, if they do not already drink. If you do drink, do so in moderation. This means an average of two or less drinks per day for men, and one or less drinks daily for women.

(A drink is 12 oz of beer, 4 oz of wine, 1.5 oz of 80-proof spirits, or 1 oz of 100-proof spirits).

Cocaine and the heart

Cocaine is certainly considered by everyone as a drug, and most people who die from cocaine use are killed by the drug's effects on the heart. There are several complications associated with cocaine use. These include myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), endocarditis (inflammation of the inner lining of the heart), cardiomyopathy, myocardial infarction, and fatal and non-fatal arrhythmias (irregularities of the heart beat).

Some of these potentially fatal complications can occur in a first-time cocaine user.

Smoking crack-cocaine, which is very potent, can lead to heart attacks (and strokes) in younger people, who are not normally at risk of heart problems.

Older people are at even greater risk because they are more likely to have diseased arteries.

It is clear that cocaine is one of the most dangerous illegal drugs in common use.

Marijuana and the heart

Marijuana use can increase the heart rate as much as 50 per cent, thus making the heart work a lot harder. It can cause chest pain in people who have a poor blood supply

Here are some tips to help you stay heart healthy

Breakfast
Try and **eat breakfast** even if you don't usually – **it will fill you up** and help prevent you reaching for a high fat or sugar snack in mid morning.

Brown
Swap your white toast for **whole grain bread**, or opt for a whole grain cereal. This can help **lower your risk of heart disease**.

Sandwich
Rather than rely on limited shop-bought lunches, **pack your own** with minimal fats and maximum fruit and vegetables.

Soup
Make your **own soups** with very little fat or salt using lots of **fresh vegetables**. It's quick and simple to make and keeps well in the fridge for a few days.

Nuts
Don't let snacking ruin your **healthy diet**. Make sure you pack fruit, **nuts and seeds** and carry some water or juice if you know you will be on the go for a while.

Casserole
Those of you who like using a **slow cooker** can prepare healthy stews or casseroles without oil or salt.

Fish
Fish pie makes a healthy and warming dish and if you use oily fish it counts towards your heart friendly **Omega 3 intake**.

Fruit
A great way of increasing your intake of **fruit and veg** is to make your own **smoothies**. Cram in as much as you fancy and whiz yourself a tasty, healthy treat.

to the heart –

and it can produce these effects more rapidly than tobacco smoking.

Marijuana causes very much some of the same effects as cocaine and cigarettes, but perhaps the effects on the heart are less potent than cocaine.

Stick-To-It Tips

THREE TOP TIPS for ensuring stick-to-it success on a new exercise programme.

ONE: Plan exercise for a specific time of the day.

TWO: Work out with a partner. Exercise is more enjoyable with a friend. It's also harder to quit when someone is depending on you.

THREE: Start slowly. If you have been inactive, start with only five to ten minutes and work up to more time as you get more fit.

The Annual General Meeting

of

THE HEART & STROKE FOUNDATION OF BARBADOS

will take place on Friday April 18, 2008

at the Foundation's offices, Jemmotts Lane, St. Michael commencing at 7:00 pm. sharp

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR. THE HON. DAVID ESTWICK
WILL BE THE GUEST SPEAKER

Make sure you attend this very important meeting
**PLAY YOUR PART IN SHAPING THE FUTURE
OF THE FOUNDATION**