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“HEART DISEASE is the leading cause of death across the population in Barbados.”

“Almost 29 per cent of all deaths in Barbados are from heart disease, the contributing factors being lack of exercise, obesity, personality traits and stress.”

Two very pertinent quotes from Dr Richard Ishmael in delivering the 2004 **World Heart Day** lecture sponsored by the then Heart Foundation of Barbados, which remain equally as relevant and true today, two years on, as when they were originally made.

Let us now look at **obesity and the heart** in more detail particularly in relation to diabetes.

A balanced diet can have a big impact on your health – now and in the years to come. It can help reduce your risk of coronary heart disease as well as some cancers. It can also stop you gaining weight, which is great news because being obese means a much greater risk of incurring diabetes, arthritis and high blood pressure. Along with stopping smoking and being more active, eating healthily really is one

Obesity and the heart

of the best opportunities you have to help keep disease at bay.

Eating a low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol diet can help reduce your risk of diabetes, **obesity and heart attack**. Eating saturated fats and cholesterol raises the level of cholesterol in the blood, which speeds the development of atherosclerosis – the build-up of fatty deposits in the inner wall of your arteries. Therefore, if your arteries become narrow because of fatty deposits, they may become blocked by a blood clot, resulting in

a heart attack.

Diabetes has been called “a disorder of the very engine of life” and for very good reasons. Diabetes is fast becoming a disease of the young. Forty years ago non-insulin diabetes was rarely seen in people under 40. Now it is being encountered in children. What’s causing this increase in the number of diabetic youths?

This type of diabetes has a strong genetic component normally becoming apparent as individuals grow older putting on increased

weight – “middle-age-spread”.

Now it is estimated that five per cent of school children have this type of diabetes. Lack of exercise and unhealthy eating leading to **obesity** have certainly been factors in this growth in the spread of diabetes. Perhaps, however, we should be looking closer to home, at parents’ responsibilities for lifestyle choices of their children. Parents, rather than the purveyors of junk food, must take responsibility for the lifestyle choices of their children.

The World Health Organisation estimates that worldwide more than 140 million people have diabetes, and that number could be double by the year 2025. The disease presents one of the most challenging health problems of the 21st century.

In Barbados, it is believed that about 10 per cent of the population suffer from being “obese”. The **Heart & Stroke Foundation** is very concerned about the increasing risk of **obesity** leading to a higher risk of the individual’s propensity to a heart attack. Therefore, the Foundation carried out a survey of attitudes to risk and then launched an extensive television media campaign of public education on heart disease prevention in late 2005 and again now. One of the major elements of this campaign is to warn of the risks of **obesity** and to give guidance on healthy eating and physical exercise.

Coping with stress

– Part 1

What is stress?

WHEN we are exposed to demands, change and threats our bodies respond with many physical changes collectively referred to as the Stress Response. Sometimes this experience can be exciting and pleasurable, and other times it can be frightening and worrying. We all need a certain amount of stress, or else our lives would be boring and empty. However, when excessive amounts of stress are

experienced for prolonged periods of time (Chronic Stress) our bodies become exhausted by constant activity. If we don’t manage stress it can damage us both physically and emotionally.

How does stress affect my heart?

Some of the physical changes included in the Stress Response are increased blood pressure and the release of fatty acids and glucose into the blood stream. These changes take place in order to help us fuel the muscles so that we can take action to protect ourselves. But when we are under Chronic Stress the levels of fats and cholesterol that are circulating in the blood stream increase and our blood is likely to clot more quickly. These conditions are potentially dangerous for our hearts. Furthermore, in an attempt to cope with Chronic Stress, we may smoke, drink alcohol, overeat or become more sedentary. All of these behaviours are risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

How can I tell when I am under chronic stress?

It is often difficult to take an objective view of yourself to see how stressed you really are. However, some common signs of stress may be easier to spot. Do you:

- Easily snap and shout at those around you?
- Often feel close to tears?
- Have reduced sex drive?
- Sleep badly?
- Fidget, pace, bite your nails or fiddle with your hair?
- Find it hard to concentrate and impossible to make decisions?
- Find it increasingly difficult just to talk to people?
- Eat when you are not hungry or skip meals altogether?
- Feel tired most of the time?
- Feel suspicious of others?
- Drink alcohol or smoke to help you through your day?
- Feel that you just cannot cope?

If you answer “yes” to four or more of these questions, then you may be suffering the effects of Chronic Stress. Of course, there are a wide range of other physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms of stress exhaustion.

Health tips

SAGA, a United Kingdom-based organisation for the over 50s, has teamed up with the British Heart Foundation and will be supporting that charity in its work. In a recent edition of Saga’s magazine they published a nine-page section entitled **The Good Health Guide**. One of the articles set out **Thirty Ways To Feel Great** and included the usual hints about drinking more water, watching your blood pressure, cutting down on salt, giving up smoking and getting tested for diabetes. There were, however, some additional ways which caught the attention such as:

● **Laughter’s a tonic.** Watch your favourite comedy DVDs as often as possible. Research by Dr Michael Miller, a scientist at the University of Maryland, proved that average blood flow increased by 22 per cent while people laughed at a comedy clip but fell by 35 per cent when watching a heavy film. Efficient blood flow is crucial for maintaining cardiovascular health, so Dr Miller prescribes 15 minutes of laughter on a daily basis as well as 30 minutes of exercise three times a week.

● **Take the stairs.** Shun the lifts (elevators) and escalators and use the stairs instead. One flight (floor) may be all you can manage to start with but the more you do it the easier it gets. Benefits include improved cardiovascular health, stronger legs and, if you keep at it, a trimmer figure.

● **Put the kettle on.** Drinking three to four cups of tea a day reduces the risk of coronary heart disease and may also have beneficial effects on mood, cognitive ability, bones and prevention of dental plaque. Green tea has more health benefits than black tea, apparently.

● **Make love.** According to a study at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Scotland people who have sex at least three times a week can look up to 10 years younger than those who make love less frequently.

● **Raise a (small) glass.** Lovers of red wine have been encouraged to enjoy their daily glass by a whole raft of studies published over the past 20 years, highlighting a lower risk of heart disease among light-to-moderate drinkers. Although a team from the University of Auckland last year claimed the earlier studies were flawed, the British Heart Foundation takes a more positive line: “Moderate drinking – between one and two units of alcohol a day – has a positive effect on the heart in men over 40 and in women who have gone through the menopause.” (One unit of alcohol equals a small glass of wine.)

GO FOR THE GOOD STUFF

LEAVE OUT THE SWEETS, THE FRIED FOODS, THE FATTY FOODS.



Eat fruit, fibre and vegetables
Every day

GO FOR THE GREENS

BE HEART SMART

For more information
visit


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