NEWS

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Information about Heart Disease (Coronary Artery Disease)
From the Montgomery County Health Department
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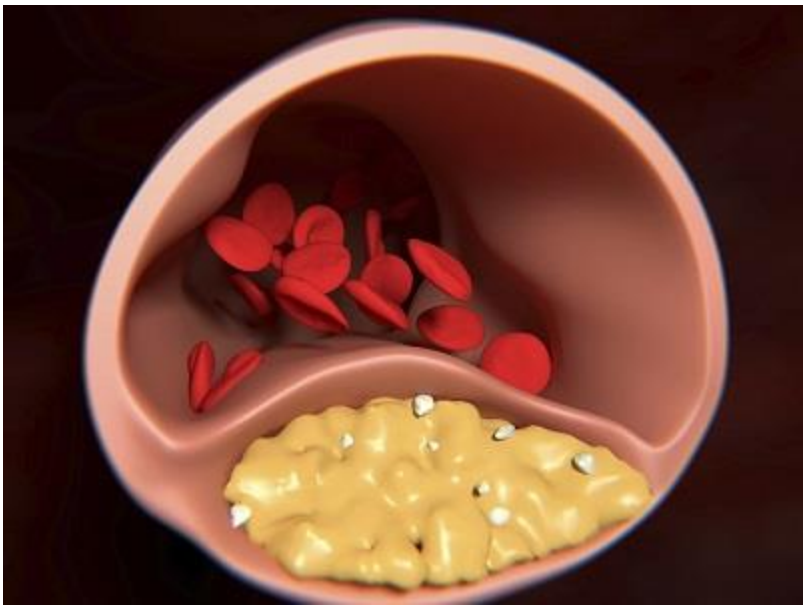
Norristown, PA (February 16, 2016) – February is American Heart Month and it is an opportune time to talk about diseases of the heart; an organ always at work, keeping people alive. According to the American Heart Association (AHA), heart disease is a simple term used to describe several problems related to plaque buildup in the walls of the arteries. As the plaque builds up, the arteries narrow, making it more difficult for blood to flow and creating a risk for heart attack or stroke.

Heart disease is the second most common cause of death for Montgomery County residents after cancer. According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 600,000 people die of heart disease in the United States every year – that's one in every four deaths. Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the most common type of heart disease and is the leading cause of death in the United States in both men and women. Coronary artery disease (CAD) develops as fats, cholesterol, and other substances build up in the walls of the arteries over time to form a plaque, causing the arteries to narrow. Some of the plaque may break off and may form a blood clot. The blood clot can block the flow of blood to the heart, which can then lead to a heart attack. Because coronary artery disease often develops over decades, it can go unnoticed until a person has a heart attack.



Coronary artery disease is caused by plaque buildup in the wall of the arteries that supply blood to the heart (called coronary arteries). Plaque is made up of cholesterol deposits. Plaque buildup causes the inside of the arteries to narrow over time. This process is called atherosclerosis.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/coronary_ad.htm

Several factors contribute to heart disease – genetics, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and lifestyle factors such as smoking, unhealthy diet, and lack of exercise.

Symptoms may be very noticeable, but sometimes a person can have the disease and not have any symptoms, especially in the early stages. Chest pain or discomfort is the most common symptom. A person may feel this pain when the heart is not getting enough blood or oxygen. Other symptoms include shortness of breath and fatigue/exertion.

Preventing or treating medical conditions can help lower a person's risk of heart disease. If a person has high cholesterol, high blood pressure, or diabetes, there are steps they can take to lower their risk for heart disease. Have cholesterol checked at least once every five years. Monitor blood pressure. High blood pressure has no symptoms, so be sure to have it checked on a regular basis. If a person has diabetes, they should closely monitor their blood sugar levels. An individual and their doctor can work together to prevent or treat the medical conditions that lead to heart disease. Consider lifestyle changes such as exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet, and quitting smoking.

Treatment

If you have CAD, there are steps you can take to lower your risk for having a heart attack or worsening heart disease. Your doctor may recommend lifestyle changes – eating a healthier diet, exercising, and not smoking. Medications may also be necessary. Medications can treat CAD risk factors such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, an irregular heartbeat, and low blood flow. In some cases, however, more advanced treatments and surgical procedures may be used to help restore blood flow to the heart.

When to see a doctor

If you suspect you're having a heart attack, dial 911 immediately. If you have risk factors for coronary artery disease (high blood pressure, high cholesterol, tobacco use, diabetes, or obesity), talk to your doctor. He or she may want to test you for heart disease, especially if you have signs or symptoms of narrowed arteries. Early diagnosis and treatment may stop progression of coronary artery disease and help prevent a heart attack.

Click on these link below for more information and resources:

- Heart Attack Risk Assessment (American Heart Association)
- What Is Coronary Heart Disease? (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
- Preparing for your appointment (Mayo Clinic)
- Understanding Blood Pressure Readings (American Heart Association)
- Build Your Quit Plan (Smokefree.gov)