



RESOURCE

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A Caregiver's Guide toward A Healthier Senior Heart





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Creative Care Management (CCM) is a professional story and a **personal story**.

Charlotte Bishop started CCM more than 20 years ago. Soon after that Charlotte's husband was diagnosed with brain cancer. Charlotte became her own spouse's personal case manager until his untimely death three years later. This personal journey evolved into a professional journey and certification as a Geriatric Care Manager (GCM) and the part of **CCM** dedicated to "Serving Elders and Others."

Creative Care Management is a team of certificated professionals providing answers to older adults in Illinois and their families.

Matters of the Heart

February is American Heart Month. Despite the fact that we hear a lot of news about cancer, cardiovascular disease is the number one killer in America today, accounting for just a bit over one-third of all deaths in the most recent reporting year. To raise awareness and encourage better "heart health" each year since 1963, the American Heart Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes for Health along with some other government agencies compile the latest statistics on heart disease and stroke.

Cardiovascular disease is important to me as a geriatric care manager, because it disproportionately targets older adults. In 2007 – the most current year for which we have data – 251.2 of every 100,000 Americans died of cardiovascular disease. For men aged 75 to 84 years old, however, the rate was almost three times as high as it was for 55 to 64 year old men. For women, the rate for the older group was more than four times as great as for their younger counterparts.

Male American Deaths from Heart Disease Ratio, BY AGE 2007

75-84yrs 55-64yrs



251.2 of every 100,000 Americans died of cardiovascular disease in 2007

Family history and genetics certainly play a role in cardiovascular disease, but there are other factors that older adults and their caregivers can help to better manage. The big contributors to cardiovascular disease are:

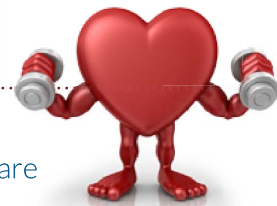
- ✓ **Hypertension:** diets high in sodium or fats exacerbate high blood pressure as does a sedentary lifestyle; individuals with hypertension also need to be vigilant in taking their blood pressure medications.
- ✓ **Cholesterol:** again, diet has a significant influence on the workload of the heart by clogging important arteries; diet and exercise are job one, but there are helpful prescription agents like statins as well.
- ✓ **Smoking:** despite four decades or warnings since the surgeon general's report, about one in five Americans continues to smoke; quitting is not easy, but it is the most straightforward way to address cardiovascular disease.
- ✓ **Diabetes:** type 2 diabetes and its attack on the micro-vascular system leads to cardiovascular disease; diet and exercise results in healthy weight loss and are the best ways to stave off this risk.



We often talk about New Year's resolutions aimed at change for the better. Why not work with your older adult or other individual with special needs to make February a Heart Healthy Resolution month?



STEPS TO A Healthier Older Heart



February gives us Valentine's Day, and February also is American Heart Month, a really good time to talk about cardiovascular wellness. The average human heart beats more than 100,000 times a day and pumps about 1,800 gallons of blood in the process. Working that hard, it may be little surprise that cardiac-related conditions represent about 27 percent of all deaths in Americans. That percent increases to 40 percent of all mortality for those ages 65 to 74 and as high as 60 percent of the deaths of people 80 years or older.

Aging sets in motion some trends which help explain the increase in mortality:

- ✓ *As arteries age, they become less flexible which can increase blood pressure.*
- ✓ *Mitral valves in the ventricles of older hearts close more slowly which contributes to a slower flow rate.*
- ✓ *The resting heart rate slows and the exercise capacity of the heart decreases with age as well.*
- ✓ *Older hearts do not squeeze as efficiently and the heart actually enlarges as the cells themselves expand by as much as 40 percent.*

But we get to exert control over how much these aging tendencies will affect our well-being. Here are some tips on how to help the older person in your orbit maintain optimal cardiovascular fitness:



Lower your blood pressure by maintaining a healthy diet with low salt but high in fruits and vegetables, quit smoking if you are a smoker, limit alcohol intake and stick to your blood pressure meds if prescribed.



Lower your cholesterol, especially your low density – or bad-lipids – with the same healthy diet and appropriate exercise; your doctor may prescribe a medication for lowering LDL, a statin.



Learn to consciously relax by dedicating time to slowing your breathing, easing your thoughts, and slowing down your pace of life; it will lower your blood pressure too.



Maintain a healthy weight which also comes from better diet and regular exercise.



When exercising, appreciate that you do not have to be aggressive about it; daily walks can be a great aid in the above.

You probably see not just a connection to healthy hearts by sticking to these five tips, but they all work with one another. Exercise is a wonderful way to lose weight or keep weight off. Eating the right foods helps to keep the weight off as well as reduce your cholesterol and clear your arteries. And when you take time to relax, you will be lowering your blood pressure as well. All of this is a recipe for a healthier, older heart. For more advice go to: About.com : <http://longevity.about.com/od/researchandmedicine/p/heartage.htm>





THE HEART of the matter

About six percent of Americans suffered from some manifestation of heart disease within the past year according to government sources. Over the most recent decades the rate of heart disease has been consistently falling, because we have increasing numbers of ways to lower cholesterol, fewer people are smoking and physical activity is catching on. Yet, for the few who may suffer from a heart attack, what happens after the attack may not get as much open attention as it deserves.

6%

Number of Americans who suffered from heart disease within the last year

Health care providers can be generally helpful in advising patients on what to make of symptoms they may feel after they have recovered.

Many hospitals and the cardiologists have gotten on board with rehabilitation programs geared to improving a patient's cardiovascular fitness prior to a full return to normal activity. And most patients will get good counsel on when it is time to go

If you have questions about any of these challenges to cardiac and life recovery, ask your health care provider, but also go to the American Heart Association's web site.

<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>



back to work. But what about some of the other parts of daily living that don't get much attention like these?

What about depression? Not everyone talks about the tiredness and generally down feeling that characterize the post-recovery period of a cardiac patient's life. The American Heart Association suggests that as much as two to six months of post-event depression are not uncommon, and there have been cases where this slump can last as much as a year or more. And then there is the fear that each small ache or odd feeling in the chest will be a warning that another attack may be on the way. Imagine living in fear of your own body letting you down?

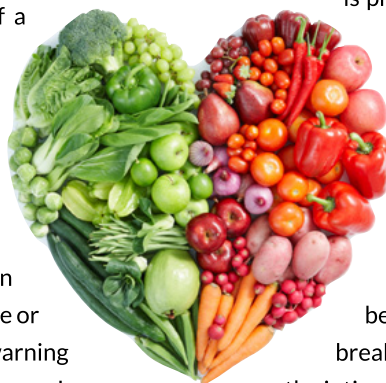
And then there is the unspoken. The patient may fear that exertion will trigger an attack, and how does a spouse feel about bringing on an attack in their mutu-

al desire for intimacy they used to share and the exertion it represents? Admittedly, it will be the patient's doctor who can best advise on when it can be safe to resume normal sexual activity, but the rule of thumb

is pretty straight forward. If a patient can climb a flight of stairs without breaking a sweat or feeling winded, then they are well on the road to resuming normal intimate relations.

So these two issues are about returning to normal. A smart move will be to not return to everything that had been business as usual. As you look to break with the down feelings and to regain

the intimacy you had enjoyed with a partner plan also on lifestyle choices that will support both of these as well. Ask about the availability of cardiovascular fitness and also about diet and other lifestyle choices that will not only help your to get back to normal, but actually get back to better than normal.





TAKE CHOCOLATE TO HEART

Okay, so it has been five days since you received that box of chocolates from your sweetheart on Valentine's Day. And if you did not consume truly massive quantities of chocolate all at once, how do you feel? The answer is you should feel the calm that comes from lower blood pressure. This is according to a group of physicians led by Dr. Dirk Taubert who did a clinical study on generally healthy people with elevated blood pressure to find out what happens to their blood pressure if they eat dark chocolate over a period of time. Very simply, they found that it statistically significantly lowered the people's blood pressure. I bring this up because as a geriatric care manager, a lot of the clients I see have blood pressure that is above what it should be. And I can tell them that the doctors say they should have a diet that regularly includes some amount of dark chocolate. People with dietary restrictions, however, need to check with their physicians.

This dietary recommendation does not take the place of the other recommendations we routinely get from medical professionals about fruits and vegetables and maintaining reasonable portions, but it does offer

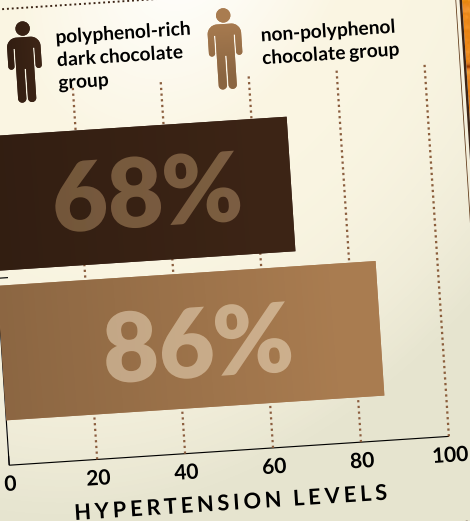
us a chance for a "healthy" dessert. Plus, while most other studies cited the beneficial effects of chocolate by simply observing some people over time, Dr. Taubert and his colleagues actually set up a clinical trial with a placebo group and all the customary scientific controls.

This study was particularly relevant to me as geriatric care manager because all the study subjects were 56 to 73 years old. Half the group received 30 mg daily of polyphenol-rich dark chocolate, and the other half of the adults got no polyphenol in their chocolate. Polyphenol is the stuff in dark chocolate that is supposed to confer the benefit. Well, 18 weeks later, Dr. Taubert and colleagues found what a lot of people have been claiming all along. Without any changes in their body weights or their lipid or glucose levels, the group who got the good stuff in their chocolate had their incidence of hypertension decline from 86% to 68%.

To add to the credibility of Dr. Taubert's research, it was published in 2007 in the **Journal of the American Medical Association**. Click on Cocoa Intake and BP to see the article. But seriously, don't eat chocolate just to lower your blood pressure. Do like I do: eat chocolate and savor the flavor.

Effectiveness of 30mg of Dark Chocolate Daily on Reducing Hypertension

AGES 56-73 YRS OLD 2007



Source: Journal of the American Medical Association: Dr. Dirk Taubert's clinical study of Dark Chocolate on Blood Pressure



CCM, Inc. can be there when you can't

We are the professionals who help families who are caring for older adults (geriatric care management) or others with special needs. Our professional geriatric care managers and special needs case managers can be your eyes and ears when you simply cannot. You can count on us to help you manage both your care-giving responsibilities, and those of your family and your work that cannot be ignored...or postponed. Some of our clients refer to us as their Sister in ChicagoSM.

We serve Chicago's North side and the North, Northwest and West suburbs as well as Central Illinois.

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