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Issue Highlights

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Heart Disease and Cholesterol Screenings

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States, killing more than 1 million people every year. While a healthy cholesterol level is just one of several factors contributing to a healthy heart, it plays a critical role in determining your risk for heart disease.

Everyone should be aware of their cholesterol level, as well as the other factors that put them at risk for developing heart disease. Periodic screening for high cholesterol is recommended for all men ages 35 to 65, and all women ages 45 to 65. If you fall within these age groups and have not had a cholesterol screening within the past 3 to 5 years, talk to your doctor about scheduling one.

What Does Your Cholesterol Number Mean?

A total cholesterol number will not necessarily tell you if you are at risk for heart disease or need the help of medication to lower your cholesterol level.

Breast Cancer Screenings

Many serious health issues can be avoided by utilizing preventative health screenings. Early awareness of potential trouble is the first step to successful treatment. Early detection through preventative health screenings is a major contributing factor to not only successful treatment, but ensuring patient health and longevity.

Excluding skin cancers, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among women. According to the American Cancer Society, about 1 in 8 (12 percent) of women in the United States will develop invasive breast cancer during their lifetime. Age is the single most important factor when determining breast cancer risk. About 1 out of 8 invasive breast cancers are found in women younger than 45, while about 2 of 3 invasive breast cancers are found in women age 55 or older. The odds of its occurrence increase from 1 in 207 to 1 in 68 between ages 30 and 40.

The best ways to screen for breast cancer are through regular mammograms, clinical breast exams and breast self-exams. The breast cancer screening guidelines are as

follows: Beginning at age 20, women should perform a breast self-examination every month, and have a clinical breast exam at least every 3 years until age 39. From age 40 on, a clinical breast exam should be performed every year along with a mammogram.

These practices should be used by all women with a normal risk of breast cancer. People at an elevated level of risk, such as those with a family history of cancer, are advised to discuss risk factors with their physician and decide on an appropriate screening program.

Men need to be vigilant about breast cancer, as well. While the incidence is not as common, an estimated 2,360 cases were reported to occur in men in 2014, with 430 being fatal. Men should report any changes in their breasts to their physician immediately.

The death rate from breast cancer has decreased in women since 1990. This is attributed to better technology-and early detection from preventive care. ◊

Source: The American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org

Cervical Cancer Screenings

According to the American Cancer Society, over 12,000 new cases of invasive cervical cancer were estimated to have been diagnosed in 2014, with 4,000 women dying from disease. However, when cervical cancer is treated early, and with the appropriate evaluation and follow-up, it can often be cured. Specifically, the incidence and mortality rates of cervical cancer have decreased 67 percent over the past three decades.

Cervical cancer was once one of the most common causes of cancer deaths among American women. However, since 1955, the number of cervical cancer deaths in the United States has dropped by about 70 percent, mainly due to the increased use of the Pap smear, a screening test crucial to the early detection of cervical cancer.

With early detection, cervical cancer can be very responsive to treatment. Therefore, regularly scheduled Pap smears are very important. All women are at risk for cervical cancer, and women with multiple sexual partners, those who began having sexual intercourse at an early age and women who smoke are at an even higher risk.

The American Cancer Society recommends that all women start having yearly Pap tests at age 18, or when the woman becomes sexually active, whichever occurs first.

According to the National Cancer Institute, the following puts women at higher risk for developing cervical cancer:

- Contracting human papillomavirus, or HPV
- Using oral contraceptives for 5 years or more
- Those with multiple sexual partners
- Having had seven or more full-term pregnancies
- Smoking

Talk to your physician about other ways you can decrease your risk. ◊

Colorectal Cancer Screenings

Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths among both men and women in the United States. However, as with cervical cancer, if it is detected early it can often be cured. In fact, the incidence of colorectal cancer deaths has been dropping for more than 20 years. There are over 1 million survivors of colorectal cancer in the United States today.

Simple preventive steps and screening procedures can greatly reduce your risk of developing the disease. Screening for colorectal cancer should begin at age 50 for people with normal risk. People with elevated risk factors should begin screenings at age 40. Screening tests for colorectal cancer include digital rectal examination, flexible sigmoidoscopy, biopsy, fecal occult blood test, and colonoscopy. Talk to your physician about which screening method is best for you and to learn more about what factors may put you at a high risk for colorectal cancer. ◊

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At the Doctor's Office

Heart Disease and Cholesterol Screenings

Be sure that your screening test measures HDL cholesterol, LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. Below are some guidelines about cholesterol levels:

Total cholesterol

200 or less—Optimal

200 to 239—Borderline high

240 or above—High

LDL (low-density lipoprotein–"bad" cholesterol)

Less than 100—Optimal

100 to 129—Near Optimal

130 to 159—Borderline high

160 or above—High

HDL (high-density lipoprotein –"good" cholesterol)

With HDL, higher is better; 60 or more reduces the risk of heart disease. If your HDL level is at 40 or below, you are at an increased risk of heart disease. Keep your cholesterol levels in check to ward off disease and remain healthy. You can do this by refraining from tobacco use, exercising regularly, drinking in moderation, limiting sodium intake and following a healthy diet. ◊

Source: The American Heart Association, www.heart.org