

Risk factor management

- An investment in your most valuable asset

There are many factors identified associated with cardiovascular disease. Some are markers of disease only, while others are clearly contributing to disease. High cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes and smoking are implicated in 75 % of incidents. Although obesity has been identified as a risk factor in itself, it's presence also contributes to difficulty in managing the 1st three conditions already mentioned. Weight management is thus an integral part of the health management program.

The most prevalent factors are:

Diabetes:

- There has been a 70% increase in the incidence of obesity related diabetes in the 30 – 39 year old group in the last 10 years globally.
- Diabetes necessitates secondary intervention equal to that of individuals who have had a heart attack.

Hypercholesterolemia:

- The incidence of familial hypercholesterolemia in the white South African (but also Jewish and other groups) population is 1 in 70, comparing to the rest of the world where it is 1 in 500.
- Only 5% of those carrying these genes have been diagnosed.
- A larger proportion of our population has abnormal lipids due to obesity.
- There is a linear relationship between lipids and cardiovascular risk.

High blood pressure:

- 30% of adults have high blood pressure.

Smoking:

- 15% of South Africans smoke.
- There is a linear relationship between smoking (past and present) and first heart attacks.

Obesity:

- In the South African leg of the Interheart study abdominal obesity played a more important predictive role for a first heart attack than smoking did.
- According to the South African Heart Foundation, 50% of South Africans adults are obese.

Psychosocial stressors:

- Depression is rated by the WHO as the 2nd most frequent cause of disability (in the workplace).
- Depression, major life events, external locus of control and personal stress has all been identified as factors contributing to progression to acute events.

Lack of physical activity:

- Several studies document the important role of moderate physical activity.
- Exercise reduces blood pressure and postpones diabetes.
- Exercise enables you to maintain a healthy weight.

- Exercise reduces heart disease by 30 – 50 %.
- Inactivity is the major contributing factor to metabolic syndrome, a condition where your muscles reduce the number of receptors ready to accept sugar into the cells, leading to high blood sugar and hence high insulin levels – explaining the term “insulin resistance”. This in time leads to diabetes.

Eating a highly refined diet:

- The bulk of our Western diet consist of carbohydrates that is either highly refined starches or sugars. In combination with inactivity, this carbo-loading contributes to high insulin levels. Limited intake of fresh fruit and raw vegetables depletes our diet of valuable cancer fighting vitamins, polyphenols and other anti-oxidants – all important in fighting chronic disease.