

Cardiac Rehab

BY SCOTT J. SACCOMANO, PHD, GNP- BC, RN

A comprehensive approach to cardiovascular rehabilitation has three goals: to improve functional ability in people with existing heart disease; to apply interventions to slow the spread of coronary artery disease and its clinical manifestations; and to decrease the risk of heart disease.

People who may benefit from cardiac rehab programs are those who have had heart attacks, or those who have heart conditions, such as congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease or angina. Additionally, cardiac rehab is prescribed for those who have had certain cardiac procedures such as a coronary artery bypass graft, coronary angioplasty, stent placement, valve replacement or pacemaker defibrillator implantation.

EXERCISE

Physical activity can improve your overall cardiac health. Physical activity helps strengthen your heart, raises energy levels and contributes to a general feeling of good health. Experts recommend participating in a supervised exercise program specifically designed for you.

Physical activity can:

- help to decrease potential risk of heart problems and reduce the demand on your heart
- reduce your cholesterol levels and decrease cardiac risk
- help you lose weight
- reduce your blood pressure.

MODIFY RISK FACTORS

Modifiable cardiac risk factors are ones that you can change yourself. Altering these factors can decrease your risk for heart disease:

Stress. Practice activities that reduce stress.

Obesity. Lose weight if indicated.

Cholesterol. Modify diet to lower cholesterol levels.

Cigarette smoking. Quit! Smokers have an increased risk of death from heart disease. Smoking removes oxygen from the blood stream and creates an environment favoring the effects of other risk factors, such as increased blood pressure. It can also increase cholesterol. Limit exposure to secondhand smoke.

Inactivity. Exercise regularly as prescribed by your physician.



Prior to beginning any physical exercise regime, check with your physician who can assist you in developing an exercise plan that is safe for you.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Lifestyle changes can be difficult during this time, but you need to understand these lifestyle changes can decrease your risk of future heart complications. The pathology of cardiac disease can be traced to certain behaviors that cause stress. Emotional stress can lead to altered metabolism, which can place extra stress on the cardiac system.

- A positive emotional state is associated with positive outcomes.
- See your doctor if you develop signs and symptoms of depression, such as inability to sleep, loss of appetite, decreased energy and loss of interest in activities.
- Attend education classes to help understand the changes to your heart.
- Learn relaxation techniques for stress management.

DIET

To reduce cholesterol and decrease the risk of cardiac disease, eat a heart-healthy diet. Changes in dietary patterns can be difficult to make, but even small modifications in dietary intake can help decrease cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure, maintain a healthy weight and improve overall health.

Develop a healthy eating pattern. Eat a heart-healthy, well-balanced diet, including a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and nonfat dairy products. Incorporate five servings of fruits and vegetables into your diet daily. Substitute wheat, oat or multigrain bread for white bread.

Maintain a low-fat and low-cholesterol diet. Avoid foods high in fat content and limit cholesterol to 200 mg a day. Butter, cheese products and whole milk are examples of saturated fats to avoid. Do use the following foods: lean meats, nonfat and low-fat dairy products, olive oil and canola oil.

Maintain an adequate blood pressure. Limit sodium to 2,000mg/per day (approximately 1 teaspoon). Prepare foods with little or no salt; use herbs and spices instead. Avoid processed foods that contain increased sodium levels and watch for hidden sodium.

To lose weight, restrict calories if overweight and avoid food with low nutritional value and high calories.

Limit alcohol intake to two drinks per day, or as instructed by your physician. Alcohol can worsen some medical conditions, such as increased cholesterol, high blood pressure and congestive heart failure. ■

Scott J. Saccomano is an assistant professor in the department of nursing, State University of New York at New Paltz.

