

# Q&A with Dr. Jeannette Yuen:

## Heart Disease 101



Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Millions have it. But, what exactly is it? Cardiovascular disease, or heart disease, generally refers to conditions that involve narrow or blocked arteries that can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

Let's get down to the basics with SMG cardiologist Dr. Jeannette Yuen.

### **There are different types of heart disease. What are the most common?**

- Coronary heart disease - plaque builds up in the arteries that inhibits blood flow.
- Arrhythmia - an abnormal heart rhythm due to changes in the electrical impulses through the heart.
- Heart attack - occurs when the blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked by a blood clot.
- Heart failure - the heart's muscle becomes too damaged to pump blood to the heart.

### **What are the primary risk factors for heart disease?**

There are risk factors that you change and some you can't. For example, your age is a risk factor you're unable to change and the risk for developing heart disease increases with age in both men and women. As you age, so do your blood vessels and they become less flexible, making it more difficult for blood to move through them easily.

Family history is another risk factor you cannot change. If you have an immediate family member (mom, dad or sibling) who has had heart disease, you have a greater risk of developing heart disease. Also, gender is a risk factor - men have a greater risk of heart disease than women.

The risks you can modify or change are smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes. These are all risk factors you can do something about.

### **Are there prominent symptoms to watch out for that may lead to heart disease?**

Abnormal chest pain, pressure or tightness in the chest are common symptoms. You may also feel a heaviness or burning sensation in your chest that can be mistaken for indigestion or heartburn. Other symptoms could include shortness of breath, palpitations or irregular heartbeats, a rapid heartbeat or dizziness or weakness. Sweating and nausea are also common signals of heart disease.

### **How can people prevent heart disease?**

There are very easy lifestyle changes you can make to reduce your risk of getting heart disease, including:

- Eat a healthy diet - low in fat, cholesterol and sodium; select foods rich in nutrients, protein and fiber.
- Get moving - physical activity strengthens your heart and improves circulation. Aim for at least 30 minutes of activity five days a week.
- Control your blood pressure and cholesterol - the ideal BP should be 120/80 and high levels of cholesterol can increase the amount of plaque in the arteries.
- Maintain a healthy weight - people with excess body fat are more likely to develop heart disease even with no other risk factors.
- Keep calm - stress can raise your blood pressure and could cause you to overeat, smoke or drink in excess.

**Dr. Yuen is deeply committed to heart health. Call (914) 723-8100 to schedule an appointment.**