Know the signs of heart disease.

Heart disease or cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States. More than 600,000 Americans die of heart disease each year according to the Center for Disease Control. The term "heart disease" refers to several conditions that impact the function of the heart, including coronary artery disease, diseases that damage the heart muscles and valves, arrhythmia disorders, and congenital defects present at birth. The yearly cost for health care services, medications, and lost productivity associated with heart disease in the United States is estimated at $207 billion.

Coronary artery disease is the most prevalent form of heart disease, caused by a buildup of plaque in your arteries. The plaque causes your arteries to narrow and harden over time, leading to a decrease in blood flow to the heart. High cholesterol and plaque buildup is referred to as atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis can progress to angina (heart pain) and eventually a heart attack. Over time, coronary artery disease also weakens the heart and causes heart failure or arrhythmias.

Symptoms:

The signs and symptoms of heart disease can vary depending on the type of heart disease. Some people have no symptoms, which is classified as "Silent" heart disease. The most common symptom is angina, often characterized as a sense of pressure in your chest or back. Patients commonly describe the pain as being similar to the feeling of indigestion or heart burn. The pain typically increases with activity or exercise and diminishes when you are resting. Chest pain that lasts longer than a couple minutes or doesn't resolve with rest may be a sign of a heart attack. If you experience pain originating in the chest or back that radiates down your arms or up to your jaw you should seek medical attention. Heart attacks are also commonly associated with shortness of breath, nausea, and extreme fatigue.

Diagnosis:

Distinguishing the presence of heart disease requires a series of exams and diagnostic tests to determine how your heart is functioning. The physician will check your heart rate and rhythm to rule out signs of arrhythmia and heart valve dysfunction. Diagnostic tests including: an echocardiogram (EKG), chest x-rays, blood tests, a stress test, and cardiac catheterization are common procedures used to confirm the presence of cardiovascular disease.

Treatment:

Having high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and/ or being a smoker can greatly increase your risk for developing heart disease. The first step in treating heart disease is to manage the underlying

conditions that can lead to cardiovascular disease. Lifestyle changes such as stress reduction and following a healthy diet are crucial in the long term treatment of this disease. Below are some of the medications used in the treatment of heart disease.

Coronary artery disease – Treatment is aimed at preventing or reducing the amount of plaque that is in the arteries, thereby increasing the flow of oxygen and nutrients to the heart. This is typically accomplished by the use of medications that reduce the amount of cholesterol in the blood. Examples of these medications are items such as statin medications (e.g. atorvastatin, simvastatin, Crestor), niacin, omega-3 supplements, bile acid sequestrants, and Zetia. PCSK9 inhibitors Praluent and Repatha are relatively new treatment options used as adjunctive therapy for adults with heterozygous familial hypercholesterolemia or clinical atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease currently on maximally tolerated statin therapy that require additional lowering of cholesterol.

Abnormal heart rhythms or arrhythmias – Depending on the type of arrhythmia, either surgical procedures, medication management, or both may be considered. For certain types of arrhythmias patients will be put on medications to prevent blood clots such as warfarin, Xarelto, Eliquis, or aspirin therapy. In other situations, medications are given that will affect how the electrical impulses are conducted through the heart in order to help restore a normal rhythm, such as amiodarone, Tikosyn, and sotalol.

Heart failure – In heart failure, the goal of treatment is to get the heart to pump more effectively. There are multiple types of heart failure determined by which part of the heart is affected. Medication therapy is targeted toward the area of the heart that is not performing properly in an effort to get the heart to pump more efficiently. Often times other medications such as diuretics (e.g. chlorthalidone, furosemide) may be used to assist in the treatment of swelling and fluid retention.

Congenital heart disease – The treatment of congenital heart disease may involve surgery, medication management, or both. Once again, depending on the specific condition and cause, therapy is tailored to obtain the best outcomes.

By knowing the signs and symptoms of cardiovascular diseases, following a healthy diet, and doing regular exercise, you can be more *ProActive* about your heart health.

For more information about your cardiovasular health, please visit your doctor or visit The American Heart Association online at www.heart.org.