Exercise and Your Heart
By Kent Pegg

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the number one killer in the United States today. Nearly one million American deaths are caused by CVD each year. That's nearly 40% of all the deaths in this country. Many of these deaths are preventable and caused by a lack of physical activity. It is estimated that one out of every eight deaths in America is caused by that very lack of physical activity.

Three of the most common types of CVD are coronary artery disease, hypertension, and peripheral vascular disease.

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is caused by atherosclerosis, or a reduction in the diameter of the coronary artery, and is the leading killer in the western world. A partial blockage of the coronary artery is called angina and a complete blockage is called myocardial infarction.

One of the best ways to reduce your risk of CAD is to eat right and exercise. Exercise has been shown to delay the progression of CAD, decrease your blood pressure, improve your lipid profile, increase your myocardial function, increase the electrical stability of your myocardium, and decrease your resting and sub maximal heart rate.
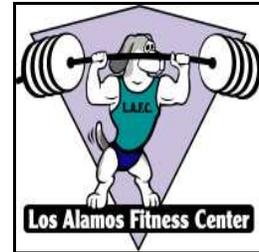
When beginning an exercise program, someone with CAD should first check with their physician to see if they have any specific recommendations. There may be some exercises that should be performed while there may be others that should not be performed.

Next, start slow and progress as your conditioning allows. Monitor your exercise intensity and stop your exercise session if you experience chest pain or overexertion.

For cardiovascular training, start by walking on a treadmill or riding a stationary bike for ten minutes. Work up to 20 to 40 minutes, at least three to four times per week. Avoid high intensity workout sessions and, when lifting weights, use lighter weights for higher (15 to 20) repetitions.

Hypertension is defined as a chronically elevated blood pressure greater than 140/90 mmHg. It is estimated that as many as 50 million Americans suffer from hypertension.

Hypertension often leads to the development of heart disease by causing your heart to work harder, reducing the elasticity of your arteries, causing a narrowing of your arteries, and increasing the risk of the formation of blood clots.

For those with hypertension, exercise should consist of low impact aerobics and light resistance weight training, both at low to moderate intensity. Start with short, frequent sessions and work up to five to six sessions of 30 to 60 minutes each week.

Peripheral vascular disease (PVD) is atherosclerosis of the peripheral arteries, especially those in the lower extremities. Because of the reduced blood vessel size, too little blood and oxygen reach the extremities during times of exertion.

One out of every eight Americans and one out of every five seniors suffer from PVD. Symptoms include pain in the calf, thigh and buttocks, and the inability\to walk more than short distances.

Proper exercise for PVD should include walking on a treadmill so your speed can be controlled. Start at 2 mph and work up to 20 to 30 minutes, even if your have to stop and rest periodically. Gradually increase to 3 mph and 40 to 60 minutes. Once you reach 3 mph, begin to increase the incline of the treadmill. Also, light weight lifting should be included in your exercise program.

Clearly, exercise is critical to helping prevent cardiovascular disease. If you are currently on a good exercise program, good for you! If not, now is the time to start enjoying all the benefits of a healthier lifestyle.

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- *Between birth and old age, you will walk about 70,000 miles!*

Kent Pegg is a certified personal trainer and the owner of the Los Alamos Fitness Center. If you have any questions about the information in this article you can call him at 662-5232.