

HEALTH Education

Effects of a Weak Heart

Ever feel short of breath? Or remember the time you could not finish a flight of stairs? Do you wish you had more energy? While some of these can be signs of a more serious problem, they could also simply be the result of having a weak heart.

How the Heart Works

The heart is a muscle that acts as a pump delivering blood throughout the body. It beats around 100,000 times each day. Blood travels from the right side of the heart to the lungs to pick up oxygen. Then, the left side receives this oxygenated blood and delivers it to the rest of the body. When the heart is weak, it can result in various physical symptoms as well as lead to long-term issues such as chronic heart disease.

Lower Energy Levels

If your heart muscle has to work harder than normal, it can cause you to develop general fatigue or shortness of breath. While these symptoms may not initially be problematic, they can become serious if not treated. Always consult with your doctor when serious symptoms, such as shortness of breath and fatigue, begin to occur.

High Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is measured from the arterial pressure when blood moves against it. If you have high blood pressure, your heart has to work harder to deliver blood throughout your body. This may cause many negative changes to the blood vessels, such as damaged, narrowing or even blocked arteries. Overtime, this can put you at a higher risk for a heart attack, stroke or heart failure.

Cardiomyopathy

Another long term effect of a weakened heart is cardiomyopathy. Cardiomyopathy is a disease that enlarges the heart muscle making it difficult for the heart to pump blood. Cardiomyopathy can either be genetic or acquired. If it is acquired, certain risk factors such as alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, or heart damage from a heart attack can contribute.

Heart Failure

Heart failure occurs when the heart muscle does not pump blood as well as it should due to a weakened efficiency. It can also be caused from a variety of factors including obesity, high blood pressure, cardiomyopathy, genetics, etc. When the heart does not pump blood efficiently, it can also lead to more health problems down the road.

While the effects of a weak heart can be substantial, there are steps you can take to lower your risk factors. The American Heart Association recommends the following tips for a healthier lifestyle:

- Participate in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week.
- Eat a heart healthy diet filled with fresh fruits, veggies, lean proteins, and whole grains.
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.

References:

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/chd/heartworks>
<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/>
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/heart-failure>



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