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## **CURRENT GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING CARDIAC HEALTH**

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Cardiovascular diseases, also known as CVDs, have gradually started to affect people at a younger age and have become the leading cause of death and disability worldwide. Each year CVDs are responsible for over 17 million deaths globally.

CVDs are a general category of disorders of the heart and blood vessels that involve any structural or functional abnormalities which impair their normal functioning. Those include such medical conditions as coronary heart disease, heart attack or myocardial infarction, angina pectoris, congenital heart disease, rheumatic heart disease, myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle), endocarditis, pericarditis, arrhythmia and others.

More than four out of five CVD deaths are due to heart attacks and strokes, and one third of these deaths occur prematurely in people under 70 years of age.

Many factors can increase a person's risk of developing heart disease and experiencing bad outcomes from it. Some of the factors leading to CVDs cannot be consciously controlled and/or manipulated, such as genetic predisposition. However, such risk factors as high blood pressure can not only be controlled, but also successfully mitigated with due resources and care.

One of the major contributing CVD factors, hypertension, affects every third adult aged 30 to 79 worldwide. Almost 75% of those people do not receive proper treatment; therefore, the disease puts strain on the heart and blood vessels and might lead to such consequences as stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney damage and other health problems.

The pace of modern life leads to frequent stress, lack of physical activity, in addition to smoking, harmful alcohol consumption, increased intake of fats, sugar, salt and caffeine. Consequences of such lifestyle may include hypertension, ischemia, vascular atherosclerosis as the heart and blood vessels are the first organs bearing the impact of such negative influences.

To reduce the risk of illness and generally improve health, it is generally advised for an average person to follow preventive measures, which mostly address their current lifestyle and may require its modification.

The main recommendations issued by the medical community to improve one's lifestyle include quitting smoking and participating in as much physical activity as possible to train heart endurance. Additionally, proper nutrition also plays an important role in one's cardiovascular health: following a healthy diet, eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, consuming good-quality proteins, replacing refined starches like white bread with whole grains and starchy vegetables, potatoes and legumes. It is highly advised to limit fat intake, eat moderate amount of food and avoid sugar- and salt-containing produce.

There is a lot of evidence that these measures proved to be effective for maintaining a healthy body weight, blood pressure, regulating cholesterol levels and providing the body with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant elements.

The abovementioned guidelines may significantly lower the prevalence of risk factors, which will result in the diminished mortality attributed to cardiovascular diseases.