

A strong heart

Even though Valentines' Day has just passed us by, we should still find time to look after our hearts because a good heart is crucial for good health!

Talking about good health, we don't just mean 'disease free' but we mean 'a good physical and mental health balance!' that sees our body parts functioning harmoniously together. To enable us to evaluate our health we should look at four interrelated conditions including our physical and mental condition, as well as the societal and intellectual conditions.

The core issue of good health is having a strong heart, one that is free from disease and functions normally. However, our heart does go out to the 'heart' because from the day we open our eyes and take our first glance of the world to our last breath our heart does not skip a beat! Therefore, we must look after our heart by not letting our stress levels get to high.

Apart from stress, fat in our arteries or what we call cholesterol actually overworks our heart because it clogs up our blood vessels so that blood cannot circulate freely in our body, therefore the heart has to work overtime to pump our blood. We can check our own blood pressure to see if our heart is working as normal or not.

When measuring our blood pressure there are 2 values that we should examine, for example 120/80 millilitres, which is considered a normal level. If your blood pressure is a little lower than 120/80 millilitres then this is considered a good level. However, if your blood pressure is higher than 140/90 then you may be suffering from high blood pressure.

Dr. Chanida Kanchanalarp explains in her book entitled "Blood pressure", that if individuals are suffering one of the following symptoms to go and get their blood pressure checked immediately. These symptoms include headaches, heart murmurs, blurred vision, blood noses, out of breath easily, fatigue, frequently passing urine during the night, ringing ears or dizziness. However some of these symptoms may be associated with kidney disease as well. Kidney disease may lead to high blood pressure and vice-a-versa.

From survey data conducted by the National Statistics Office, we can see that approximately 23% and 21% of Thai males and females respectively, have high blood pressure. However, it is alarming to know that only one half of these people are actually aware of their blood pressure problem.

This disease is rather a worrying one as the effects of this disease may not be apparent to the individual in the short term, and tend to become apparent when your blood pressure is already high. Hence, this disease has been named the "quiet killer."

High blood pressure can be associated with death and disability due to **cerebrovascular accident (CVA)** and can manifest itself as **Brain Ischemia**. This is a disease that is a major problem with statistics showing that in 1999, 60,000 people died from this, which makes a total of 7 deaths per hour!

The fundamental ways to reduce the chance of getting high blood pressure is to decrease consumption of fatty, salty and sweet foods. Focus on increased consumption of vegetables and cereals. Increase the amount of physical activity such as walking fast for at least half and hour per day. If individuals do this everyday they will decrease their chance of getting high blood pressure. In addition try to breathe slowly and rhythmically, like our older generations used to say “breathe deeply.” Meditation, Yoga, Taikek, Chigong which are creations from the ‘East’ are also great ways to decrease blood pressure.