

Basic Principles in Treatment of Coronary Heart Disease

Understanding the basic principles in the treatment of coronary heart disease is very important. The treatment consists of medications and, when necessary, angioplasty or bypass surgery along with life style changes and stress management. This communication aims to explain as to which patient needs intervention like bypass surgery or angioplasty and which one can do well only on medications, life style changes and stress management and to stress the need for further research in this field.

Heart, like any other part of the body, needs oxygen and other nutrients to sustain. For this, it needs to get regular supply of blood. It gets nutrition through separate arteries called coronary arteries. It is necessary that these arteries remain healthy in order to keep the heart healthy.

Causes of Coronary Heart Disease

Risk factors of coronary heart disease are: heredity, high blood pressure, use of tobacco in any form, high cholesterol, diabetes and unbearable stress. When more than one risk factor is present, the risk is not only additive but it multiplies.

Accumulation of fat like substance in the wall of coronary arteries makes them narrow which leads to reduction in blood flow. Moreover, the walls of the arteries are very sensitive. They constrict suddenly for various reasons like severe cold and stressful situations. Such factors also lead to thickening of blood flowing in the arteries. Thus accumulation of fat like substance is a stable element and sudden contraction of arteries and thickening of blood are unstable elements. Both these elements reduce blood supply to the heart muscle.

Clotting of blood in the arteries reduces the blood supply to the heart, resulting in weakening of the heart muscle. In such situations, we cannot give complete rest to heart muscle as we give to any other part of the body when it suffers injury, because heart has to function ceaselessly to keep the body alive. Hence, the management of coronary heart disease needs not only medical but also psychological measures. The author has explained such a holistic approach in his book "Heal Your Heart: Heart Disease, Prevention and Total Healing".

Angina

Pain, discomfort or uneasiness felt in upper part of body between naval and ear lobes, which is relieved by rest or on taking a pill (Sorbitrate) below the tongue is called angina. There are two types of angina: stable and unstable angina. In stable angina, pain or uneasiness is felt while climbing stairs, on walking after meals, lifting weight or after unaccustomed physical exertion, which is relieved by taking rest or by a pill of Sorbitrate under the tongue. The mortality of the patients with stable angina is only 1% higher than that of the general population. In unstable angina, there is sudden onset of chest pain even at rest. Taking a Sorbitrate tablet under the tongue may reduce but not relieve the pain completely. In such cases, angioplasty may save a life by reducing the chances of severe heart attack.

Treatment of Stable Angina

For patients of stable angina, treatment consists of medicines like aspirin, beta blocker, calcium blocker, ACE inhibitors, cholesterol reducing drugs and life style changes. It has been proved that this mode of treatment saves lives and most of the patients can lead a long, healthy life. However, even patients with stable angina who are leading very active life can improve their quality of life by angioplasty or bypass surgery. Angiography should be restricted to the patients needing angioplasty or bypass surgery. If angiography is done only to assess the extent of blockage in the arteries, it can cause fear to the patient that he is sitting on a volcano and may die any moment. This fear is not true. In the treatment of coronary heart disease not only the intensity of the disease but also the perception of the intensity by the doctor and the patient plays an important role. Each case should be assessed from all points of view.

Need for Angiography

There are other methods and tests available to ascertain the need for angiography and to know the likely benefits of bypass surgery or angioplasty. These include Stress Echo Cardiography and Stress Nuclear Scan. In diagnosis of heart disease, if electrocardiogram at rest is normal, the patient is advised to get treadmill test. And if this test indicates reduced blood supply to the heart, angiography is recommended. For angiography one has to get admitted into a hospital. Now there is another simple

examination called cardiac calcium score to know the severity of blockage in coronary arteries. It is a non invasive method and is done by a special x-ray machine without hospitalization or injection of a dye.

On seeing the blockage in the angiogram, doctors and patients instantly decide for bypass surgery or angioplasty without apparent need for intervention. Doctors and patients do not reconcile with the fact that all stenoses do not require intervention. This phenomenon is called "occulostenotic reflex".

No study has shown that patients undergoing bypass surgery live longer than those who are on medical treatment. Bypass surgery improves longevity only in those cases where a patient has a blockage in the left main artery or triple vessel disease with reduced left ventricular ejection fraction (LVEF). However, it does not offer significant benefit to the patients with normal LVEF.

Natural Healing

When a plaque gets deposited in a coronary artery, wall around the plaque automatically expands and reduces the blockage. Further, small arterioles develop near the affected area to open new paths for blood circulation. This process reminds us of Father of Medicine, Hippocrates, who observed that the body has the inherent capacity to heal itself.

There are other factors also, which enhance healing. Doctor's self-confidence and reassurance to the patient contribute greatly. Professor Benson John of Harvard Medical School, USA went to Dharamshala to learn the benefits of meditation. At the end of his visit, Dalai Lama explained to him three basic principles of Tibetan medicine for successful healing:

1. Doctor's faith in himself that he will cure the patient.
2. Patient's faith in his doctor that he will cure him.
3. Doctor's skill and its application with love.

Holistic Approach

Research continues for safer and affordable methods and therapies. Programs like Universal Healing Program empower the patient to make lifestyle changes without the sense of deprivation. Patients, even with advanced coronary heart disease, especially those who are considered technically unfit for surgical intervention, also benefit by intensive medical

management, lifestyle changes and in-depth stress management.

There are a large number of patients who cannot afford surgery. They now have a ray of hope in successful management of their Coronary Heart problems. This also involves intensive medical management and the patient's participation in in-depth stress management, consisting of abdominal breathing, shavasana and meditation.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is equally important for patients with stable angina in regaining near-to previous condition of fitness. A well organized rehab-program helps in increasing the effectiveness of collateral circulation and strength of the heart muscle.

Appropriate Use Criteria for Angioplasty or Bypass surgery

The American College of Cardiology Foundation (ACCF), and other organizations conducted an update of the Appropriate Use Criteria (AUC) for Angioplasty and Bypass Surgery. The primary objective of AUC is to improve physician decision-making process and patient education regarding expected benefits from revascularization and to guide future research.

These guidelines are in consonance to what has been expressed in this communication.

Long-term wellness

It is also important that the patient should continue the treatment prescribed by his cardiac physician. Some times when patients feel better, they reduce the dose of the medicine or stop it altogether. This can lead to serious problems. Patients should not change their treatment on advice of lay people and information from lay sources.

It is a wrong notion that only by-pass surgery or angioplasty can help in lengthening life-span and patient can do without medicines after the surgery. On the contrary, life style changes with proper medications, under expert guidance, help to live a long, healthy life.



Programs of Shavasana and Meditation in English, Hindi and Gujarati languages along with other publications of the Author may be downloaded – free of cost – from the website: www.universalhealing.org

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Disclaimer:

Above communication is for information only. For the treatment you should follow the advice of your physician.

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