



## Four Strategies to Protect Your Heart Now

By Dr. Ayo Bankole

Heart disease remains the number one cause of death of Americans.<sup>1</sup> It accounts for nearly two deaths a minute and takes the lives of nearly 650,000 people each year.<sup>1</sup> That's more than those killed by opioid abuse, auto collisions, U.S. soldiers killed in combat, non-combat, and terrorism combined. Around 400,000 people at risk for heart attack have coronary artery bypass surgery performed annually.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 805,000 Americans still have a heart attack every year.<sup>2</sup> These statistics are despite routine screening for heart disease and widespread use of antihypertensives, aspirin, and cholesterol medications. There's no doubt that heart surgery and prescriptions save and extend lives, but the fact that heart disease remains the number one cause of death can only mean that often, these treatments fail to address the true cause of disease for many. Contributing to this, many don't know they have heart disease until they have a heart attack. Compounding these shocking statistics is the fact that health researchers and professionals alike consider heart disease to be preventable. I believe that by making some changes in our approach to heart disease and by incorporating the four strategies described below, on a personal and societal level, we can make heart disease uncommon.

### 1) Get Thorough Testing

Many people who have heart disease don't even know it.<sup>3</sup> That's because most doctors fail to test anything other than cholesterol levels if you don't have a traditional risk factor for heart disease. The unfortunate truth is that you can have heart disease in the absence of traditional risk factors; there's just no way to know without ordering the right tests. Conveniently, many important markers are available with simple blood testing. For example, I routinely examine how proficient HDL, or "good" cholesterol is at carrying "bad" cholesterol away to the liver. I also will examine not simply the value of "bad" or LDL cholesterol but also its size. Small LDL particles are many times more dangerous than large ones. Other useful markers include Lipoprotein(a), homocysteine and many more. There are even cost-effective markers to learn your genetic risk for heart disease. While these and other blood markers are useful for identifying risk factors, the Carotid Artery

Intima Media Thickness testing is a sensitive, and non-invasive way to determine the presence of diseased arteries in the earliest stages of heart disease.<sup>4</sup>

## **2) Take Nutrition to Heart**

The cardiovascular system is front line when it comes to the effects of your nutrition. If your choices consist mostly of processed and fried foods, animal protein and refined carbohydrates; expect higher levels of inflammation, elevated “bad” or LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. These three together are a triple threat to the heart but they are just a few of the evil players. On the other hand, eating several servings of fresh produce, beans and whole grains daily, along with a few servings of cold-water deep-sea fish a week helps prevent inflammation, oxidation, and unhealthy elevations of LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. Drs. Dean Ornish, Nathan Pritikin, and others have laid out irrefutable evidence of the relationship between our diet and risk for heart disease.<sup>5,6,7</sup> More, they’ve shown that better choices not only prevent, but can reverse heart disease.

## **3) Get the Heart Pumping**

Sitting for long periods of time is not only an enemy of health and longevity in general but is specifically toxic to the heart. With jobs increasingly being sedentary, lack of movement affects many of us. The remedy is to get moving! Although it’s ideal to dedicate at least 20 minutes a day to exercise, research suggest that just getting up from your seat frequently and performing some exercise several times a day for just a few minutes helps us nullify the effects of long hours of seating. Next, make a commitment to add regular exercise to your routine. If you aren’t conditioned or accustomed to physical activity, five- or ten-minute walks twice daily are a safe and comfortable place to start. Increase the duration by five or ten minutes every week until you’re up to at least thirty minutes. From there, if you’re healthy enough for physical activity, consider swimming, jogging, biking, rowing, or walking hills to increase the aerobic output further.

## **4) Less Stress and More Love**

Across the globe, ancient and contemporary peoples have appreciated the relationship between our emotions and our heart. Sayings like one’s heart is “heavy” with grief or one is suffering from a “broken” heart aren’t just metaphorical. In fact, there is evidence that one can actually die of a “broken” heart. Takotsubo syndrome is a form of heart failure known to characteristically occur after suffering the loss of a loved one. It presents like a heart attack, occurs most often in women and fortunately, is usually reversible. A study in 2017 showed that a diagnosis of depression doubled the risk of and was the strongest predictor of death amongst individuals with heart disease.<sup>8</sup> Sadness, despair, and depression is indeed a heavy toll for the heart to bare.

Work, relationship and financial are just some sources of stress we are all familiar with. Medicine has long recognized the vary connection between stress and increased risk of

high blood pressure, heart disease, and even heart attacks. Studies have also found that stress leads to increased levels of “bad” cholesterol, decreased levels of “good” cholesterol, and is associated with having to take cholesterol lowering medications.

There is no “magic” pill for treating stress or sadness. Anyone suffering from clinical depression should seek professional counseling immediately. We can all benefit by including activities that stimulate joy, creativity, and community. Activities like joining a heart healthy cooking class, dance, or art class are great ways to connect with others while nurturing your heart. Also, spending time in nature is associated with increasing happiness and lowered stress. Accomplish this by going to a local trail and hiking a few times a week. Sign-up with a local group to join in on hikes or walks with others. Many enjoy small fitness classes not only for exercise but for establishing friendship and bonds with others. No matter the activity, stress modifying behaviors help tilt the balance in favor of your health, decreasing the very significant risk that stress and sadness play on heart health.

Lifestyle related factors account for most of our risk to heart disease. By making sure to get thorough testing, queuing in on proper, heart health nutrition, getting our bodies moving to ensure the proper amount of exercise and cultivating joy and connectedness, we can do our part to turn down the dial on heart disease.

### **Dr. Ayo K. Bankole**

Bankole is a licensed Naturopathic Doctor treating persons with heart disease, cancer and other environmental and lifestyle related conditions. He also possesses advanced training in environmental medicine and uses IV nutritional therapy, detoxification and chelation therapy as appropriate.

He is a member of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians [www.naturopathic.org](http://www.naturopathic.org), the California Association of Naturopathic Doctors [www.cand.org](http://www.cand.org), and the American Academy for the Advancement of Medicine [www.acam.org](http://www.acam.org).

To learn more about our comprehensive approach to treating heart disease and other conditions register for one of our free dinner seminars or call 909-981-9200 right away.

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