

# C A R D I A C

## M O N I T O R

For our patients

Spring/Summer 2007

### Cardiac Monitor — a resource for you

*Cardiac Monitor* highlights the latest news in cardiac care and features helpful information about diet and exercise, medication and prescription updates, upcoming educational opportunities, and ongoing profiles of different Mercy services.

Distribution of *Cardiac Monitor* is intended for patients who are active participants in any of the Mercy Heart Institute Cardiovascular Disease Management programs, or who have had a recent hospitalization for a cardiovascular-related condition. The information included in this newsletter is provided as an educational service. If you wish to be removed from the mailing list, please call (916) 733-6966.

## Is medication or stent best for stable coronary artery disease?

By Michael Chang, MD, Medical Director of Cardiovascular Services, Mercy Heart Institute

Atherosclerotic heart disease, or coronary artery disease (CAD), is the narrowing or blockage of the heart arteries. Many patients who have been diagnosed with CAD are considered *stable* because the level of blockage can be managed effectively through powerful medications like statins combined with lifestyle modification, such as a diet lower in fat and cholesterol, increased exercise and no smoking.

If the disease is more advanced, patients are considered *unstable* and cardiac intervention such as a stent or balloon angioplasty is often recommended to open narrowed coronary arteries, improve blood flow to the heart and decrease chest pain.

Recent news reports have highlighted a research study called COURAGE that showed medication therapy alone is just as effective as intervention for stable CAD patients. Unfortunately, a number of media reports neglected to differentiate between stable and unstable CAD patients and suggested the use of stents may not be necessary — causing a few patients to decline proceeding with a recommended stent.

It is important to note that all of the patients in the COURAGE study were very stable CAD patients. By definition, these patients are doing well with medication and lifestyle management and will not need an interventional procedure. Patients with unstable CAD were excluded from the study.

The majority of patients treated in Mercy’s Cardiac Cath Labs have *unstable* CAD, such as heart attack, heart failure or arrhythmia. Many of these patients come through the Emergency Department or are new patients who are seen in their cardiologist’s office with onset or worsening chest pain.

Another factor in the overall results of the COURAGE trial may be the use of bare metal stents in the study group that had cardiac intervention, which have been documented to cause a higher rate of restenosis than more successful drug-eluting stents.

Considering the fact that only very stable CAD patients were analyzed in the study, the results are as expected. Mercy Heart Institute supports stabilizing CAD patients with medical therapy whenever appropriate and provides ongoing cardiovascular disease management programs to help patients prevent future disease development or progression.

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### Five power foods to help fight heart disease

- **Spinach:** No other food packs as much nutrition per calorie. Containing at least 13 compounds identified as antioxidants and anticancer agents, spinach is rich in vitamins, calcium, fiber, folate, iron and omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Salmon:** Rich in protein and high in “good” fat, salmon helps protect against stroke and heart arrhythmia.
- **Oatmeal:** This fiber-rich comfort food boosts the body’s ability to fight infection and helps lower bad cholesterol levels.
- **Walnuts:** An excellent source of omega-3s and protein, walnuts — consumed in moderation — can help lower cholesterol.
- **Strawberries:** This delicious fruit is full of antioxidants to protect the body’s cell structures.

*For more tips on heart-healthy eating, see Healthy Choices, page 2.*

**Mercy Heart Institute  
Cardiologists and  
Cardiac Surgeons**Michael L. Chang, MD,  
Medical Director**Cardiac Electrophysiologists**Padraig G. O'Neill, MD  
Arjun D. Sharma, MD  
Stephen I. Stark, MD  
Larry J. Wolff, MD**Cardiac Surgeons**John R. Dein, MD  
Allen S. Morris, MD  
Richard J. Kaplon, MD  
Stephen J. Rossiter, MD  
Frank N. Slachman, MD  
Henry Zhu, MD**Cardiologists**Arvin Arthur, MD  
Richard Axelrod, MD  
Philip M. Bach, MD  
Scott B. Baron, MD  
Rohit Bhaskar, MD  
David A. Bayne, MD  
Raye L. Bellinger, MD  
Larry E. Berte, MD  
Dennis R. Breen, MD  
Alan R. Cabrera, MD  
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Kenny Charn, MD  
John Chin, MD  
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Lee-Tzu Lin, MD  
Reginald I. Low, MD  
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Kevin L. Stokke, MD  
Rajendra S. Sudan, MD  
Patricia A. Takeda, MD  
Daniel D. Vanhamersveld, MD  
William Vetter, MD  
Mark A. Winchester, MD  
David E. Woodruff, MD  
Zi-Jian Xu, MD**Mercy Cardiovascular Services**Doris G. Frazier, RN, MS  
Vice President

## Two sides of healthy eating: whole foods and sensible portions

Summer is the perfect time to take advantage of the abundance of fresh produce available in grocery stores and at local farmers markets. Not only will you notice the fresh taste, but you'll be fighting heart disease and other diseases like diabetes by eating a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

Remember, though, it's not just *what* you eat that's important. It's also how much.

### Getting the Good Stuff

Like putting high-grade gasoline in your car, eating good food makes your body run better — and longer. A diet rich in fiber, vitamins, antioxidants and healthful oils, such as omega-3 fatty acids, lowers the risk for stroke and heart attack.

To ensure that your daily diet is full of these potent, disease-fighting elements, first go for color. The more colorful your plate, the healthier the food selection.

It's the good vitamins and minerals — the beta carotene, the flavonoids — that give fruits and vegetables such beautiful colors.

### Portion Size Matters

Too much of any food can be a problem. When you take in more calories than you burn, the body stores the rest as excess fat, which is linked to health problems including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, coronary artery disease and stroke.

Even if you know what foods make up a “good” diet, pay attention to portion size. If you are having rice or pasta, a healthy portion size for most people is about the size of a tennis ball. A serving of fish or lean chicken is the size of a deck of cards. Fill up the rest of your plate with fruits and vegetables.

One final tip: Eat until you feel full, not until your plate is empty.



## Is exercise a “remedy” for all heart disease?

By Jeanne G. Knapp, MS, ACSM Exercise Specialist,  
Mercy General Hospital Cardiac Conditioning Program

The various treatments for coronary artery disease include angioplasty/stent procedures, open heart surgery, or medications and/or lifestyle changes such as weight loss, diet and exercise. Treatment is based on your specific health history. **Although none of these treatments alone is a cure**, most patients report many benefits from a regular aerobic exercise program.

The benefits of exercise include lowering blood pressure, increasing HDL and lowering LDL cholesterol, losing weight, increasing muscle endurance and strength, lowering blood sugars, improving the heart's function, reducing abnormal heart rhythms, decreasing angina episodes and improving overall quality of life. These benefits are especially important for cardiac patients since many of the benefits of exercise directly affect the heart's arteries, heart muscle or the risk factors that promote more disease.

A large collection of studies (JAMA, 2000) showed patients who participated in a 12-week exercise training program after having a heart attack had a 20–25% reduction in death. This result is similar to the benefit of cardiac medicines such as aspirin, beta blockers and ACE inhibitors, which reduce death by 15–25% in the same type of patients.

Regardless of the type of treatment or cardiac condition, exercise probably can improve your quality of life. Talk to your doctor about: What exercises are beneficial? What intensity is safe for your condition? What other precautions should you take? Overall, exercise may be one of the least expensive treatments and have the best benefits — making us feel better and live healthier lives!

## Why it's important to take your medicine for coronary artery disease

By James Palmieri, PharmD, Clinical Pharmacist

It is a challenge for some people to stay motivated to keep taking their medications as part of their treatment for coronary artery disease (CAD). Until an event occurs, CAD is usually without symptoms and it is common for people to “forget” to take their medicines. Others may feel that they are taking “too many” medications and are concerned that the benefit of these medications aren't worth the risk of drug interactions or side effects. Still others find they cost too much.

These are a few of the barriers people face in managing a chronic disease such as CAD. But sticking to your medication regimen is an important piece of your therapy (along with equally important lifestyle changes) to maintain your health and quality of life.

Here's how coronary artery disease can lead to heart attack: CAD is a chronic condition involving fatty deposits (including LDL) and inflammation along the inner walls of blood vessels that supply oxygen-rich blood to the heart. The sites where LDL is deposited are known as atherosclerotic plaques. Plaques may become unstable (cigarette smoking is just one of the many causes), signaling the body to

form blood clots at the site of the plaque. This leads to reduced blood flow to the downstream tissue through narrowing of the blood vessels and/or clotting. The resulting injury or death to that tissue causes angina and/or a heart attack.

Once atherosclerosis develops, a variety of medications and lifestyle changes are required to control the disease and prevent its harmful effects. You may expect to take medications to prevent clotting (aspirin, clopidogrel or warfarin), reduce the effects of “ischemic angina” (beta blocker, calcium channel blocker, nitrate or some combination) and lower cholesterol (statins alone or in combination with others to reduce LDL, reduce plaque inflammation and stabilize the plaque). In addition, multiple medications may be required to manage other diseases that increase the risk for CAD (such as hypertension, diabetes mellitus, chronic kidney disease and HIV/AIDS).

These medications are designed to help you with treatment. If you are having trouble sticking with your medication program, ask your doctor, pharmacist or disease management specialist to assist you so you can stay in charge of your health.



### Follow Your Heart

More than 300 people enjoyed Mercy Heart Institute's fifth annual Follow Your Heart event on May 11, which reunites cardiac patients with their cardiologists, cardiac surgeons and nurses. Yvonne Fouch, 91 (left, with Billie Jeanne Nielsen), was acknowledged for participating in Mercy General's Cardiac Conditioning program since its inception in 1983.

### Coronary artery disease

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If you have stable CAD, the most effective weapon you have to fight the disease is to ensure you are on the right medications, particularly the use of statins in the aggressive treatment of cholesterol, which makes a significant impact on managing CAD. You must also be diligent in taking your medication.

If you experience worsening chest pain, new pain, more frequent pain or pain that does not go away with nitroglycerin, a cardiac catheterization or other diagnostic test may be required to determine if further intervention is necessary — which can prevent complications of unstable angina, such as heart attack, heart failure or death. See your doctor immediately, and if pain is extreme call an ambulance.

### The beat goes on... ICD Support Group

The ICD (Implantable Cardiac Defibrillator) Support Group meets the fourth Monday of February, April, August and October from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Mercy General Hospital Main Auditorium.

The meeting on Aug. 27 will include a presentation by James Palmieri, PharmD, Cardiovascular Disease Management Clinical Pharmacist. He will be discussing the role of medications to support lifestyle management of cardiovascular risk.

Scheduled for October are break-out sessions for female patients, male patients and family members. Topics covered during the break-out sessions include issues related to living with an ICD or arrhythmia, emotional concerns following a sudden death experience, dealing with short-term memory loss and group support and conversation.

The 2007 annual ICD holiday gathering will be on Monday, Dec. 17. The night will include appetizers, desserts and holiday cheer, as well as a program presented by Ken Rogaski, Manager, Mercy General Hospital Cardiac Conditioning.

ICD group members enjoyed the annual picnic on June 9 at Oki Park, with catering by JR's BBQ.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### **Mercy Heart Institute**

#### Cardiovascular Disease Management Programs

Heart Smart and CHAMP®:  
(916) 564-2880

Cardiac Conditioning:  
Mercy General Hospital  
(916) 453-4521

Mercy San Juan  
Medical Center  
(916) 537-5296

Smoking Cessation:  
(916) 453-4927

Mercy Mall Walk Program:  
(916) 564-2880

**Mercy Heart Institute**  
**1-877-9HEART9**  
[www.CHWhealth.org/](http://www.CHWhealth.org/)  
MercyHeart

### **Healthy Heart Series — free**

#### *Mercy General Hospital*

All classes are held on Thursdays from 1:30–3 p.m.  
Call 453-4521 for dates and location.

**Topics include:** Diabetes nutrition and low-fat cardiac diet.

#### *Mercy San Juan Medical Center*

All classes are held on Tuesdays from 11:15 a.m.–12:15 p.m.  
Call (916) 537-5296 for dates and location.

**Topics include:** Emotions and heart disease, diabetes management, diabetes nutrition, low-fat cardiac diet, managing your response to stress, your heart and cardiac procedures, your medicine cabinet, exercise guidelines, cardiovascular risk factors.

### **Congestive Heart Active Management Program (CHAMP®)**

All classes are held from 8:30 a.m.–12 p.m.  
For schedule and locations, call (916) 564-2880.  
Pre-registration is required.

**Topics include:** congestive heart failure, medications, low-sodium diet, social issues, exercise and activities.

### **Heart Smart**

All classes are held on alternating Tuesdays from 9:30–11:30 a.m. and alternating Thursdays from 1:30–3:30 p.m. For times and locations, call (916) 564-2880. Pre-registration is required.

### **Diabetes Management and Nutrition for Today! — free**

All classes are held from 10 a.m.–12 p.m. For schedule and location, call (916) 564-2880.

**Topics include:** Monitoring blood sugar, medications, exercise, preventing complications and healthy food choices.

### **Cholesterol Screenings**

First Thursday of every month. Fees are \$25 for Lipid Panel; \$30 for Lipid plus Glucose. Twelve-hour fasting is required.

For an appointment or information, call:

Mercy General Hospital (916) 453-4521  
Mercy San Juan Medical Center (916) 537-5296

### **Mended Hearts Support Group**

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of every month from 7–8:30 p.m. For more information, call (916) 773-5263.

### **ICD Support Group (Defibrillator patients)**

Meetings held every other month.  
For information, call (916) 733-6966.

### **Mercy Mall Walk Program — free**

Country Club Plaza, Sunrise Mall  
Monday-Saturday, 8–10 a.m.  
For more information, call (916) 564-2880.

### **American Heart Association Heart Walk**

Sept. 22, William Land Park



Mercy Heart Institute  
3939 J Street  
Suite 220  
Sacramento, CA  
95819-3633

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