

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Three Ways to Reduce Heart Disease Deaths Globally”

Heart disease is a term used to refer to several diseases of the heart and circulatory system, including coronary artery disease, heart arrhythmias, heart attack, angina and heart failure. Coronary heart disease (CHD) is a narrowing of the small blood vessels that supply blood and oxygen to the heart. CHD is also called coronary artery disease. So, don't let the terms confuse you. Just remember that none of them are good. Patients can even have “silent heart disease.” New research from Harvard suggests that three tried and tested interventions could prevent many of those deaths if implemented through global policies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 17.9 million deaths worldwide each year are due to cardiovascular disease, accounting for an estimated 31% of yearly global deaths. In a new study, researchers from the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, MA, have pinpointed three well-known, verified interventions that have the potential to prevent a significant number of such premature deaths. The three public health interventions combined could help extend the lives of 94 million people over 25 years, from 2015 through to 2040. But, policymakers across the world have to commit to implementing the recommended measures. The researchers used data on mean blood pressure levels, as well as sodium (salt), and trans-fat consumption in populations from different countries. Three "well-known interventions," namely: lowering blood pressure, reducing sodium intake, and eliminating trans-fat from one's diet could have an important beneficial effect in terms of preventing millions of premature, cardiovascular event-related deaths worldwide. Boosting the reach of treatments for high blood pressure to 70% of the world's population could save an estimated 39.4 million people. They also estimate that reducing salt consumption by 30% could prevent an estimated 40 million deaths. This is important because high blood pressure is a top risk factor for the development of cardiovascular disease. Finally, they note that cutting the intake of trans fat, which is present in many fast food products and can endanger heart and vascular health, could extend the lives of 14.8 million people. Over half of all the premature deaths these interventions would prevent, as well as two-thirds of deaths delayed before the age 70, would most likely be among men. These three interventions have enormous potential to save lives. According to the American Heart Association, more than 15 million people have heart disease and it is the leading cause of death in the United States. Symptoms include chest or arm pain, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, irregular heartbeat and unusual tiredness.

In the America that I love, we will educate the public about the signs and symptoms of heart disease and of ways to decrease its risk factors.

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