

Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

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Thoughts from Dr. Amy

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From families returning from vacations to children starting school, autumn is a season of change. That makes it the perfect time to embrace new habits that help you enjoy a healthier life—and lower your risk for a heart attack or stroke.

On average, it takes about two months to form a new habit, according to a recent study published in [European Journal of Social Psychology](#). However, the researchers found that some people can set healthy new behaviors, such as drinking more water at lunchtime or jogging for 15 minutes daily before dinner, in as few as 18 days.

For this month's newsletter, I'm challenging each of you to establish three new habits, by doing these three activities EVERY day for the next two months.

1) Do 30 minutes of physical activity. This could range from brisk walking to dancing, biking, running, or another sport of your choice. To make working out a habit, I recommend doing your preferred exercise EVERY day at the SAME time, rain or shine. Once this routine is established, you will miss it if you skip it. If you

travel frequently, select exercises that you can do at the hotel gym or in your hotel room using packable equipment like a jump rope or exercise bands. I also advise all who are able-bodied to stop using escalators or elevators and ONLY take the stairs! These small 'steps' make a big difference—join the 'stair-only' club.

2) Eat 8 ounces of berries. This habit probably sounds simple compared to the exercise piece, but it packs powerful health benefits. Berries (particularly blueberries and strawberries) have tremendous disease-fighting antioxidant value, decreasing vascular inflammation while naturally providing nitric oxide (the healthiest "food" for blood vessels) to your artery walls. With the omnipresence of Starbucks for fruit/berry cups and a bounty of berries available at the grocery store or farm stand, getting your daily "dose" of these tasty treats should be easy—and delicious!

3) Practice mindfulness for 15 minutes. Mindfulness is a form of meditation that typically involves focusing on your breathing or the present moment as you calmly observe the thoughts that arise in your mind, then let them float away, like soap bubbles. In a [recent eight-week study](#) of heart patients, those who were trained in mindfulness had significant reductions in chest pain (angina), depression, anxiety and stress, and reported a better overall quality of life, compared to a control group.

What's more, a [study of diabetics](#) reported striking improvements in blood sugar when

they practiced mindfulness for 15 minutes daily for three months. In fact, the more mindful the study participants become, the better they were able to manage their disease!

Once these three habits are established, you'll be an inspiration to others in your quest to achieve optimal health. As Aristotle wrote, "Excellence... is not an act but a habit." Keep it up. I'm proud of you!

To Your Health ~ Dr. Amy

Stay in Touch!

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Is New Cholesterol Drug Praluent a Breakthrough in Heart Attack Prevention?

You may have seen headlines hailing the new cholesterol-lowering medication Praluent as an “[potentially amazing discovery](#),” a “[game changer](#)” and “[a major advancement in fighting heart disease](#).”

Along with claims that the drug could offer a “new era of hope” for the millions of Americans suffering cardiovascular disease—the nation’s leading killer—and media predictions that Praluent will be “a huge seller,” concerns have been raised about the impact of its high cost (about \$14,600 a year) on the healthcare system.

There’s also debate about which patients should consider this medication—and whether health plans will cover it. Here’s a closer look at the new cholesterol drug, with guidance from Dr. Amy to help you sift facts from hype.

Question: What is Praluent?

Dr. Amy: Approved by [the FDA in July](#), Praluent (generic name alirocumab) is the first of a new class of cholesterol-lowering drugs called PCSK9 (proprotein convertase subtilisin kexin type 9) inhibitors. This type of medication, administered by injection, is an antibody that targets a protein called PCSK9. This protein reduces the liver’s ability to remove LDL (bad) cholesterol from the blood. By blocking this protein, PCSK9 inhibitors help reduce LDL levels.

Question: Who is a candidate for this treatment?

Dr. Amy: There are three categories of patients with high cholesterol who may benefit from PCSK9 inhibitors:

Those who cannot achieve their LDL goal despite taking the maximum tolerable dosage of statin therapy (cholesterol drugs like Crestor and Lipitor).

Those with familial heterozygous hyperlipidemia (heFH, an in-

herited condition that causes high levels of lipids).

Patients with high cholesterol who are unable to tolerate statin drugs due to side effects of these medications.

Question: How effective is Praluent?

Dr. Amy: In five clinical trials involving 2,476 patients who had heFH or were at high risk for heart attack and stroke for other reasons, those who received Praluent had an average drop in LDL levels of 36 to 59 percent, compared to patients who took a placebo. All participants were also taking the maximally tolerated dosage of statins, with or without other lipid-lowering therapies, such as improved lifestyle.

Question: What are the potential side effects of Praluent?

Dr. Amy: In clinical trials, the most common side effects included itching, swelling, pain or bruising in the area where the drug injection was given; stuffy or runny nose, coughing, sore throat; or flu. Allergic reactions included skin rash due to inflamed small blood vessels, requiring hospitalization in some cases. Before taking any new medication, discuss the potential risks and benefits with your medical provider, as well as other treatment options.

Question: What don’t we know yet?

Dr. Amy: While multiple studies have shown that statin therapy lowers heart attack and stroke risk, it has not yet been determined if adding a PCSK9 inhibitor to statin therapy would further reduce risk for cardiovascular events. A clinical trial to find out is now in progress, according to the FDA. We also don’t know what effect, if any, this type of medication has on vascular inflammation—a key player in heart attack and stroke risk.



Eating healthy doesn’t need to be boring. This wonderful salsa adds delightful, fresh flavor. Serve with jicama slices or as a topping for grilled salmon. Enjoy!

Delicious Recipe for Strawberry Pepper Salsa

Ingredients:

2 cups fresh strawberries, stemmed and chopped
1/2 red onion, thinly sliced
1 jalapeno pepper, diced
1/2 red bell pepper, chopped
1/2 green bell pepper, chopped
1/2 orange bell pepper, chopped
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
Salt, pepper, and cilantro to taste

Instructions:

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Makes 6 servings. (Adapted from “[Stellar Farmers Markets Recipes](#).” Click link for more ways to enjoy fresh produce.)

