



Getting a Good Diagnosis

HEART DISEASE

Partners at *Heart*



ST. JOSEPH
MERCY HOSPITAL

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Port Huron
Hospital



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HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HEART OR CIRCULATORY DISEASE?

Some people have symptoms such as chest pain, shortness of breath, irregular heart beats, and others have no symptoms. However, just having a simple blood test to check your cholesterol, or having your blood pressure checked and discussing your health history with a qualified physician will give you the information you need to decide whether or not you need further treatment.

Many Americans die each day from heart disease, the nation's number one killer. Many are struggling to recover from a heart attack, while others at high risk are getting the care they need and making the necessary changes to lower their risks.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR HEART OR CIRCULATORY DISEASE?

The number of risk factors you have determines your risk of heart disease. Some risk factors can be controlled, and it has been proven that doing so will reduce the chances of heart or circulatory disease developing or worsening.

RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

- ▶ Family history of heart disease
- ▶ High cholesterol
- ▶ Gender and age: females 55 years or older or past menopause; males 45 years or older
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ Smoking
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Low HDL (good) cholesterol

WHY SEE A CARDIOLOGIST?

A cardiologist is a medical doctor who specializes in diseases of the heart. This is a highly specialized field requiring four years of medical school, three years of internal medicine residency, and three-to-five years of cardiology fellowship or training.

WHAT WILL A CARDIOLOGIST DO?

A thorough medical history and physical exam will give the doctor information needed to determine if further tests are required. At your first visit, the nurse will take your blood pressure. You may have a blood test to check your cholesterol, and you may have an EKG (electrocardiogram). This simple test graphically records the electrical activity of the heart and can reveal evidence of heart attacks or insufficient blood supply to the heart. Other tests, such as an echocardiogram, electrophysiology (EP), exercise stress test, vascular studies, or nuclear imaging test may also be ordered.

WHAT IS AN ECHOCARDIOGRAM?

An echocardiogram, also called an echo test, uses sound waves to take moving pictures of the heart. This test is used to assess the pumping function of the heart and can show the doctor if there is heart disease or problems with the heart valves. It is painless and has no side effects.

WHAT IS AN ELECTROPHYSIOLOGIC (EP) STUDY?

An EP study evaluates the electrical function of your heart and helps your physician to evaluate rhythm disturbances accurately and reliably. It will help your doctor to determine the most appropriate treatment option for you.

WHAT IS A STRESS TEST?

An exercise stress test, or treadmill test, is done to examine the heart's ability to function under physical stress and exercise. The results help diagnose heart disease, causes of chest pain, and coronary artery disease.

WHAT IS A NUCLEAR IMAGING TEST?

Nuclear medicine is a specialty that has been practiced since the 1940s. The purpose of this test is to evaluate the cause of certain symptoms you may be having such as chest pain and/or shortness of breath. This test will help establish a diagnosis of heart disease.

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WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

There can be some risk involved with certain diagnostic procedures. Please ask your doctor to discuss the risks and benefits so that you are well informed about any tests you may have.

WHAT WILL THE RESULTS OF THESE TESTS TELL THE DOCTOR?

After your exam and any tests that were done have been reviewed, you and your doctor can determine an appropriate treatment for your diagnosis. Your doctor may tell you that further diagnostic testing, such as cardiac catheterization, is necessary. This is usually done as an outpatient procedure at the hospital.

Your doctor may tell you that lifestyle changes, modifications to diet, and exercise are needed. You may need to be put on special medications.

You can do plenty to get your heart in shape.

- ▶ Improve your eating habits
- ▶ Stop smoking
- ▶ Be more active, and EXERCISE!
- ▶ Take your medications

SHOULD I KNOW THE SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK? **ABSOLUTELY!**

The signs of a heart attack may include:

- ▶ Pain and/or pressure in the chest
- ▶ Pain spreading to shoulders, arms or neck
- ▶ Feeling faint or out of breath
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Sweating

*If you experience
any of these symptoms,
seek emergency
medical attention.*