

Physicians put heart in right place

By Mary Caruso
Of The Saucon News

A heart attack is a frightening thing, and not something anyone hopes to experience, either in one's own health, or that of a loved one. Most people think of a heart attack as something dramatic, as emanated by television scenes where ambulances are rushed in to transport a lifeless body to the hospital.

In reality, heart attacks often occur slowly, and are sometimes not even noticed by the patient.

Many doctors have long been in a quandary as to what can be done to treat or prevent this possible killer.

Doctors Harvey Castro and Luis Tejada, of St. Luke's Hospital, have been working on a vitamin combination that may address this long overdue solution.

Castro, a resident at St. Luke's Hospital in Bethlehem, and Tejada, an interventional cardiologist with a private practice in Bethlehem, have teamed up with nutritionist Dennis Passante to produce a vitamin they call "Active Heart."

While heart attacks have always been around, Castro said he thinks the community is now more aware of its conditions and effectiveness. "It's the number one killer, both of male and females," he said.

Castro said he actually became interested in medicine while working at a health food store during high school.

In his home state of New York, Castro said he was intrigued by the comments of elderly people as they frequented the store.

"They would tell me what herbs and stuff worked for different ailments, and I became fascinated with it," he said. "I got interested in alternative medicines and wanted to learn the science end of it."

Castro pursued his drawing, and became a physician.

"When my father died of a heart attack, I began to take heart health more seriously."

In coronary heart disease, the the arteries carrying oxygen-rich blood and nutrients become narrowed and, eventually, an inadequate supply of blood and nutrients damages the heart muscle which can lead to chest pain and a heart attack.

With coronary artery disease (CAD), the heart's arteries can become narrow, causing atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. This occurs when plaque collects in the artery walls and, as it builds up, the arteries narrow and blood flow is reduced.

Sometimes a little of the plaque breaks off and gets into the blood stream going to the heart. When the heart can't get enough oxygen-rich blood to stay healthy, the flow of oxygen is stopped, and a heart attack occurs.

When Castro entered his residency and met Dr. Tejada, the two began discussing vitamins that they thought would help reduce the dangers or clogged arteries.

"I wanted to start my own vitamin line," Castro said, "so I could do a service to people and give them something affordable."

He was surprised at the costs of vitamins sold on the open market.

Castro began researching various pharmaceutical firms, and found that most complimentary heart supplements cost nearly \$100.

Castro suspected the cost escalated where companies claimed their product carried certain ingredients not available in over-the-counter formulas.

"I told Dr. Tejada about it, and he also like the idea," Castro said.

The pair have spent nearly two years researching the medical field for combination of vitamins, filtering out what was good and what was not.

Their product combines the traditional elements known to help heart health, such as L-arginine, an amino acid that helps to open the arteries, and also some Omega-3 fatty acids, which have been proven to help lower cholesterol.

"However," Castro said, "no one else seems to have the same percentages in their formulas that we do."

Since vitamins are considered a food supplement, FDA approval is not needed.

"No one wants to research vitamins, because they can't be patented," Castro said.

The duo has now combined a number of fatty acids with an added Vitamin B complex to hopefully lower one's cholesterol.

Castro said they had looked at a ton of medical literature, researching what was already on the market, and checking the data on each ingredient's strength.

"Some of their research was questionable," Castro said.

Castro described homocystienenes as a risk factor that can be checked by blood work. When it is elevated in the blood, it produces heart disease. Vitamin B complex lowers the substance and reduces the risk factor.

According to Castro, most heart attacks are genetic, and carry a recurring range of low to high for future generations.

If the levels are high, there is greater risk of a heart attack.

He hopes that his vitamin combination will lower one's hormones, and thus lower the risk factors of persons prone to heart attacks.

"Most people know that smoking creates a risk factor for heart attacks, but we are finding that diabetes is almost worse than smoking, particularly in African Americans and Hispanics," Castro said.

While both doctors prescribe a regiment of diet, exercise and medication to combat coronary disease, they believe the small capsule, taken three times a day with meals, will aid greatly in reducing the risks of heart attacks.

Although the trio contend that their product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease, and they know there is no guarantee in prolonging life expectancy, their goal is to provide quality vitamins using the finest ingredients that have been studied through the medical community.

Their product is currently being manufactured and will not be ready for release until July 5, but the doctors claim they are already receiving pre-paid orders.

Interested persons may view their products at their Web site, www.vitalcomplex.com

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