

LIVING LIFE AFTER A HEART ATTACK

HAVING A HEART ATTACK MAY BE A TERRIFYING EXPERIENCE, BUT IT CAN PROPEL YOU TOWARDS A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE.



Take your medications as prescribed

To some people, taking medications methodically every day can be a pain. But this is important as medicines can greatly lower your risk of another cardiac event. Many people with heart disease have other conditions that increase their risk of heart disease, like high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. Taking your medications accordingly also helps you to manage them better.



Participate in cardiac rehabilitation

Cardiac rehabilitation is a medically supervised programme offered in many hospitals to help you recover after a heart attack. Patients usually receive a referral by their doctor to attend cardiac rehab when they are discharged from the hospital.

Attending cardiac rehab diligently is important because they help to speed up your recovery. During the sessions, you will learn how to make changes that can protect and strengthen your heart. You'll also take part in activities that will improve your heart function. All these will lower your chances of complications or dying from heart disease.

After a heart attack, you may feel scared, confused and overwhelmed and it's understandable. But most importantly, a heart attack is a wakeup call that you need to change your lifestyle for the better. According to the American Heart Association (AHA), after a first heart attack, most people go on to live a long, productive life. However, around 20 % of patients age 45 and older will have another heart attack within five years of their first.

Here are the lifestyle changes you need to make to prevent future heart attacks or heart disease, so that you can go on to live a full and productive life.



Eat a heart healthy diet

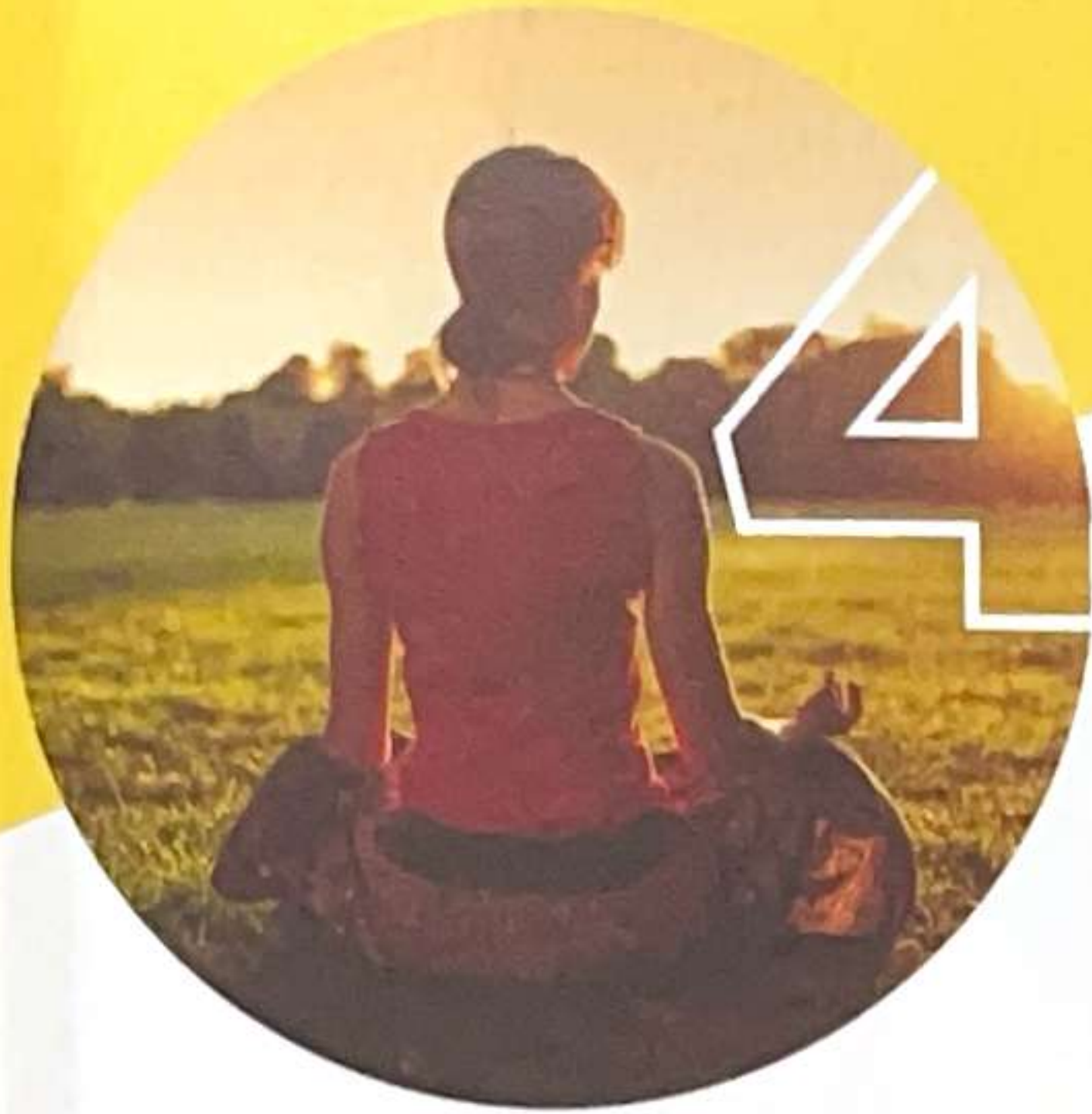
Eating a diet that is low in salt and saturated fat is important if you've had a heart attack. You should make fresh foods the main part of your diet by including a wide variety of fruit (aim for two serves per day) and vegetables (five serves per day), plain meat, poultry and fish, reduced fat dairy, as well as plain unsalted nuts and legumes.

Limit processed meats like sausages and deli meats, fast-foods and salty, fatty and sugary snacks like chips, cakes and biscuits. Choose healthier snacks like plain unsalted nuts and fruits.

For healthier fats and cooking oils, choose vegetable fats like olive, canola, sunflower and sesame oils.

Drink mainly water and avoid sugary or sweetened drinks. Caffeinated drinks like coffee and tea should be taken in moderation.

For more information on Dietetics & Food Services, please contact our Outpatient Diet Clinic at +603-2600 6596.



Take care of your emotions

After a heart attack, people can experience a range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, anger, depression and loneliness. These emotions can affect your recovery and future health. So, it is important to take care of your emotional and mental health as well as your physical health.

Having the strong support of friends and family members can reduce feelings of loneliness and is important for your recovery. A study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association (AHA) analysed the responses of 3,432 heart attack patients and found that those with low social support (who felt that they didn't have friends or family they could confide in or lean on for emotional or financial support) showed lower mental functioning, worse quality of life and more depressive symptoms.

Meanwhile, studies show that the use of psychosocial therapies, which involve both psychological and social aspects, are promising in the prevention of second heart attacks. If you feel depressed, anxious or overwhelmed by stress after a heart attack or stroke, talk to your doctor. Do not keep silent about it as it can worsen your condition.



Exercise regularly

For those who have had coronary heart disease, engaging in moderate-intensity physical activity on a regular basis is good as it helps you to recover better, reduce your risk of future heart problems, improve your long-term health, energy and mood and help you manage your weight, cholesterol and blood glucose levels better.

Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. It's recommended to start slowly and gradually build up the intensity as not to burden your heart and body. Walking is a good type of physical activity for those with coronary heart disease as it is a low-impact activity that is gentle on the body. Other recommended activities include yoga, tai chi, swimming and resistant strength training.

Always talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise programme to make sure that the exercise you would like to do is safe and suitable for you.

For more information, please contact our Physiotherapy Department at +603-2617 8339 for an appointment.



Quit smoking

Smokers who quit after having a heart attack have similar levels of chest pain and mental health as non-smokers, according to research published in AHA's journal Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes.

AHA states smoking as one of the most preventable causes of premature death in the United States. It increases the risk of several disorders, including atherosclerosis (build-up of fatty substances in the arteries), which can lead to heart disease and stroke.

A 2015 study shows that quitting smoking after a heart attack has immediate benefits, including less chest pain, better quality of daily life and improved mental health. Many of these improvements became apparent as little as one month after quitting and are more pronounced after one year.

For more information, please contact our Quit Smoking Clinic at +603-2600 6731 for an appointment.

References

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