

# Kids experience same heart disease risk factors as adults

If statistics remain constant, 36 million of today's 83 million children will eventually die of heart and blood vessel disease.

The American Heart Association warns that heart disease does not respect age, or the lack of it. It strikes infants, children and teens. American children are its greatest resource, so, in a sense, cardiovascular disease is putting or entire nation at risk.

Children exhibit the same risk factors as adults when it comes to heart disease. Weight, blood

pressure, cholesterol levels, activity level, and exposure to smoking all are variables in determining the health of your child's heart.

Michigan children are at increased risk of suffering from cardiovascular disease due to the following facts.

Michigan children are the heaviest in the nation, with 37 percent of girls and 38 percent of boys being overweight.

Thirty nine percent of Michigan children have elevated cho-

lesterol levels, compared to a national average of 29 percent. Twenty percent of African American females and 16 percent of African American males, ages 7-14, have high blood pressure.

## High blood pressure

Michigan junior and senior high school youth have four times the national average of "severely high" blood pressure.

Twenty percent of the waking time of our children is spent watching television.

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Of all the risk factors for chronic disease, lack of physical activity is the most prevalent in Michigan. Sixty three percent of Michigan high school students fail to meet the minimum national standard for physical activity, which is at least three 20 minute

sessions weekly.

Adults can do much to minimize their risk of heart disease and stroke, and the same is true of children. We must encourage our children to exercise. Even moderate levels of exercise are beneficial, resulting in weight

control, lower blood pressure, improved psychological well being, and a predisposition to be more physically active as adults.

As parents, we must do more than encourage our children to exercise. We must serve as positive role models by living an active lifestyle ourselves.

## Low fat diet beneficial

Diet contributes to our children's weight problems, but it is also a factor in high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.

Although the fast growth rates of infants and toddlers require a higher percentage of calories from fat, most children would benefit from a diet low in fat, saturated fatty acids, and dietary cholesterol.

Limiting salt and eating a variety of foods in order to get enough carbohydrates, protein and other nutrients is also important.

It is wise to encourage our children to consume only enough calories to maintain a healthy weight in relation to height and build. Once again, adults would do well to follow this advice themselves.

## Smoking big risk

Smoking is the biggest risk factor for sudden cardiac death. Smokers' risk of heart attack is more than twice that of non-smokers. Once more, secondary smoke endangers those people close to smokers. It has been shown that being in the vicinity of a person who smokes a pack of cigarettes a day is comparable to smoking half a pack. Secondhand smoke accounts for between 30 to 60,000 deaths nationwide each year. Today, over nine million children under the age of five live with at least one smoker, and are therefore exposed to secondhand smoke almost every day. Recent studies presented at the American Heart Association's 71st Scientific Session indicate that adults serve as important role models to children where smoking is concerned. This is especially true with preschool age children.

## Adolescent smokers

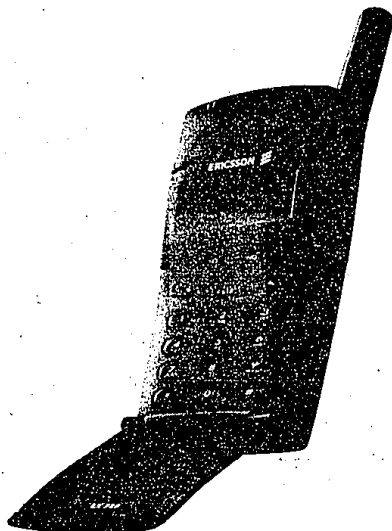
Each year in Michigan, the tobacco industry welcomes more than 123,000 new smokers to replace those who quit or die. Ninety percent of these new smokers will be children or adolescents. One of 10 Michigan adolescents smokes regularly. The dangers of secondhand smoke and the examples we set for our children should warn adults to change current smoking habits to help change the smoking habits of our young people.

Actually, many of the factors affecting the incidence of cardiac disease in children have their base in the behavior of adults. Heart health is one more area where we cannot order our children to "do as I say, not as I do." If we as adults serve as healthy role models for our children, it is more likely that they will live the heart healthy lifestyle themselves, and continue to do so as they grow.

If the frightening cardiovascular statistics for Michigan children are to be changed, we must change. We must change the habits of our children, but perhaps we should look to ourselves.

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