

Jim's Story

A family history of Coronary Heart Disease



How does Jim's family history affect him?

Jim had not been to the doctor in 10 years. At 48, he generally felt healthy and did not feel he needed to go. His wife went regularly for check-ups and tried a number of times to convince Jim to see the doctor. Jim finally decided to go so that his wife would not worry about him.

The doctor did a number of tests at the appointment. He told Jim that his cholesterol was high and that he was overweight. He asked Jim if his previous doctor had warned him that these problems put him at an increased risk for heart disease.

Jim admitted that he had not been to a doctor for a check-up in 10 years. During his last visit, the doctor had mentioned that he should try to eat healthier foods and exercise more. Jim worked long hours and felt he didn't have time to eat healthy or exercise. He also didn't think that it would make much difference anyway.

The doctor asked Jim some questions about his family health history. The doctor learned the following information:

- Jim's mother had a stroke in her 50's,
- an uncle on his mother's side had a heart attack in his late 40's, and
- his grandfather on his mother's side had a heart attack in his late 50's.

The doctor told Jim that his family health history placed him at increased risk for heart disease and stroke. Jim was surprised. He had always assumed that he did not have to worry because his father was healthy.

The doctor then asked Jim about his lifestyle. Jim told the doctor the following:

- **Diet** – Eats about 1 serving of fruits and vegetables, several servings of meats high in animal fats each day
- **Exercise** - Lifts weights once per week
- **Tobacco** - Does not smoke
- **Alcohol** - Drinks 2 or 3 drinks a day
- **Aspirin** - Does not take aspirin regularly



What can Jim do to help prevent future heart problems and improve his overall health?

The doctor told Jim that changing his lifestyle could help reduce his risk for heart disease and stroke, lower his cholesterol levels, and improve his overall health. He also said that regular screening tests could help identify health problems early, when they are most treatable. Because of his family health history and high cholesterol, the doctor said it was especially important for Jim to adopt these changes and have regular screening tests.

The doctor recommended the following lifestyle changes and screening tests to reduce Jim's risk of heart disease and stroke and to promote his overall health:

Lifestyle/Behavior *

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day
- Reduce intake of saturated fats, particularly fats from animal products
- Increase activity to at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on 5 or more days a week, or at least 20 minutes of vigorous activity on 3 or more days a week
- Continue to not smoke
- Limit to one or two alcoholic drinks per day
- Consider taking a daily aspirin

*For more information on lifestyle changes, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

Health Screening Tests

- Cholesterol testing regularly (typically recommended at least every 5 years—doctors may recommend more frequent screening for individuals with high cholesterol or with other risk factors for heart disease)
- Blood pressure checked every year
- Blood glucose (sugar) testing every 3 years (doctors may recommend more frequent screenings)

Because of his increased risk for heart disease and stroke due to his family health history and high cholesterol, Jim decided that it was important to try to make these changes. He talked to the doctor about ways to be more physically active and have regular health screenings. The doctor also discussed medications that Jim could take to help lower his cholesterol.

In addition, the doctor told Jim that sharing family health history information with siblings and other family members is important. Jim could help them become aware of their family history of heart disease and stroke and how it affects their own health.

