

# Doctor urges 'heart healthy' environment

By CYNTHIA SCANLON  
Special to The Business Journal

Americans are moving at a faster and faster rate, a lifestyle that can be hazardous to the heart; says Dr. Stanley Pearson, a cardiologist with Cigna Healthcare of Arizona and chairman of Internal Medicine.

It's time for business men and women to consider ways they can become more "heart healthy," he says.

"Most people with hypertension still feel well and function, but they pay for the ravage effects of chronic heart problems later on," he says.

Statistics bear this out. Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 killer in America. And of the 923,000 Americans who die each year from heart disease, one-sixth are under the age of 65, according to the American Heart Association. The Heart Association also estimates that nearly 59 million Americans suffer some form of cardiovascular disease, ranging from congenital heart defects to high blood pressure and hardening of the arteries.

Some of the things Pearson warns business people about include too much coffee intake, fast-food lunches, smoking, stress and alcohol. For instance, a strong cup of coffee contains 200 milligrams of caffeine, a weak cup 80 milligrams.

"People use caffeine as a morning stimulant, which gives a high, but there's a price to be paid for it," he says. "It's a direct cardiac stimulant that makes your heart beat faster, your blood pressure rise, and, in some cases, causes irregular heartbeats. It can also make you hyper and irritable."

According to Pearson, fast-food lunches are high in sodium and fat, both of which contribute to coronary disease. "It's best to eat things that are grilled and broiled as opposed to fried," he says.

However, it has become easier to eat healthier fast foods because restaurants are using more monounsaturated oil instead of polyunsaturated fatty oils, he says. Most eateries also include salad bars and heart healthy diet items on their menus.

One of the biggest health culprits in an office environment is stress. Pearson said it is impossible to eliminate stress, but business people should learn ways to control and minimize it.

"The stress won't go away because there's always stress in performance expectations," he says. "And when you tie in profitability, that further heightens it."

Pearson says the trick to keeping stress from taking an unhealthy toll is to put the body in the best position to deal with it. That means having exercise habits that are consistent, getting a moderate amount of rest and having down-time and recreation to regroup.

Pearson says that in exercise it is not so much the quantity that is important, but to be consistent with a program. "Consistency builds quantity," he says. "The more you do, the more you want to do. You'll find you have more stamina to deal with the stresses of the workplace."

A thorough health examination should also be performed for everyone by the age of 40. This includes blood pressure, cholesterol level and risk-factor assessment. People with a history of heart disease should have assessments done in their 20s and 30s.

Pearson recommends taking steps now to see that heart disease doesn't become part of the future. Consider limiting the intake of caffeine or switch to decaffeinated coffee and colas. Eat salads for lunch and take a brisk walk afterward, and quit smoking.

"Coronary disease is largely a condition of the Western world and directly linked to what we eat, our environment, and our activity level," Pearson says. "People need to take responsibility for their health, and we can begin by changing some of the things we do every day at work."



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