

## Reversing/Preventing Heart Disease

### Description:

Most everyone has had a loved one suffer from Cardiovascular disease. It remains the #1 cause of death in the United States in 2018 with 43.8% of deaths due to heart attacks, and 16.8% due to stroke. Heart attacks and strokes are both caused by Atherosclerosis, the plaque build up in artery walls (AHA, 2017) eventually causing a blockage leading to heart attack (blockage in the heart) or stroke (blockage in the brain). Most people are well-informed what cardiovascular disease is, but are not informed how it can be reversed. Dr. Dean Ornish, Cardiologist and founder of the “Undo It” program, has scientifically proven plaque buildup can not only be minimized, but also reversed! Part of his four-step program includes yoga to help reduce stress. His program has been proven so effective that insurance companies and Medicare reimburses patients who participate in the “Undo It” program. Ornish’s program consists of the following recommendations:

- Eat well – a nutritious plant-based mostly vegan diet, avoiding sugar and foods high in trans and saturated fats.
- Move more – find activities you will enjoy! Well-balanced fitness includes stamina, strength, and flexibility.
- Stress less – the practice of yoga and meditation teaches a patient how to stress less, and not be so reactive.
- Love more – Giving and receiving love and support makes you healthier and happier. Scientific studies show oxytocin helps a person deal with stress in a much healthier way with the love and support of family, friends and community (Ornish, 2018).

Helping people (and myself) prevent cardiovascular disease is one of my passions after losing my Dad to heart disease when he was only 70 years old. At 52 years of age, he had a life-saving bypass surgery, which gave us 18 more years to be with him here on this earth. My Dad was not overweight, nor did he smoke; however, he did love to eat animal fat (which at the time we did not know was so harmful), and being a man of the “Silent Generation” (Robinson, 2018), he was taught to hold in his stress, and not express his feelings. In my studies to complete my Health and Wellness BS degree, I am convinced that a mostly vegan lifestyle is the best way to prevent heart disease. As Amber Jaworsky said at the 2017 Legacy of Love Retreat, “Aim for an 80% vegan diet (Jaworski, 2017).” Dean Ornish’s studies show how animal protein reduces telomere length. The longer a person’s telomeres are, the longer they live. Another convincing

former Cardiologist is Dr. Ellsworth Wareham, who has lived a vegan lifestyle since his 50's, and today he is currently 104 years young. His advice how to avoid heart disease includes:

- Vegan diet
- Get plenty of sleep
- Move! He still mows his lawn, gardens and helps with housework.
- A good marriage
- Good community
- Remember the Sabbath – as a 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist, he addresses how taking a day of “rest” has a profound effect on reducing stress.
- Don’t stress – “do the best you can, and don’t give any thought to what is out of your control.” “Don’t worry and fret.” (“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup>Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Phil 4:6-7).
- Have a positive outlook – focus on the positive things rather than the negative. (“....Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.<sup>9</sup>Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me— everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.” Phil 4:8-9).

We all experience stress in our lives. Having a positive outlook on stress as a challenge, and the body’s way to prepare a person for the challenge is a key component to dealing with stress, says Kelly McGonigal, Psychologist, in the following TedTalk: .  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEU&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0zWAmKQthF1wzduUii3s12EsjnG-r54FZJ2T2EYxXflox3ehcqlbxDy3s>.

### **Symptoms:**

Symptoms of plaque buildup which can lead to cardiovascular disease if a person does not change their lifestyle:

- High LDL Cholesterol
- High Blood Pressure
- Cold, numb hands and feet
- Men – Erectile dysfunction

Benefits of Yoga	Precautions
Meditation, Pranayama and moving with breath reduces stress and lowers cortisol levels (McCall, 2014). “A peaceful heart	Cardiovascular patients should obtain a doctor’s release before beginning any type of physical activity.

leads to a healthy body..." (Proverbs 13:30)	
Vinyasa Flow and Power Yoga increases heart rate giving a good cardio workout.	Certain types of pranayama should be avoided for acute cardio patients.
Promotes mindfulness in daily living, how much we move and what we eat.	Cardiac patients should avoid Hot Yoga or Bikram Yoga.
Living according to the Fruits of the Spirit ("...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control..." Gal 5:22-23) and the Yamas and Nyamas (also Biblical principles) reduce stress response.	Patients with unsteady blood pressure or blood sugar levels.
Yoga classes provide community (such as the Love and Support in Ornish's 4 <sup>th</sup> step), which also helps reduce stress.	
Stretching the body releases stress physically and mentally. Our body "records" stressful moments in our life, and stretching can release the built-up tension.	

### Mini Flow:

This mini Vinyasa (Yoga flow) has plenty of big arm movements and incorporates the large quad (thigh) muscles to increase the heart rate. This gives a person a good cardiovascular workout, similar to walking or jogging, repeated several times (YJ, 2012).

- Simple seated breath prayer – inhale “Be still”....exhale “and know that I am God”. (Breath Prayer for 5-10 minutes, then moving into warm-ups poses and flow.)
- Exhale Downdog – inhale right leg up into 3-legged dog – exhale bring right leg forward into low lunge – inhale right arm up for a twist
- Exhale bring right arm to inside of right foot, and inhale left arm up for side angle pose.
- Exhale left arm (while in side angle) counter clockwise, and inhale as you circle up. Exhale reverse direction circling clockwise down, and inhale arm back up as you rise into Warrior 2. (Upward arm movements increase heart rate giving the heart a work out.)
- Inhale and exhale in Warrior 2 – exhale reverse Warrior – inhale pivoting sideways on mat into Star Pose, exhale bending at the knees (keeping knees behind toes) into horse and inhale back into Star. Repeat flowing between Horse and Star 3-5 times. (Engaging the large quad muscles increases cardiovascular workout.)

- Inhale Star – exhale begin circling the upper body from the waist up, leaning to the left, bending and walking the hands from left foot to right foot – inhale up; exhale reverse clockwise and inhale back to Star.
- Exhale turn left toes towards back of mat – inhale – exhale Triangle.
- Inhale Reverse Warrior – exhale cartwheel down keeping right leg raise for One-legged Chattarunga Vinyasa flow (exhale lowering down to half push-up, inhale Updog, exhale Downdog).

## References:

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