

HOW SOON CAN HEART DISEASE START?

Adult Problems Can Start in Childhood, Says NIH

One of our recent heart health articles pointed out how exercise and healthy eating—even started later in life—can reverse the trend toward heart disease for older Americans. Now let's take a look at the flip side of the coin. Unfortunately, the foundations for heart-related illness are being laid at a younger and younger age- even preadolescents can show signs of thickened artery walls due to high cholesterol, shows a study from The National Institutes of Health.

Heart disease remains the primary cause of death in the US today, sometimes causing death during the most productive years of life. Up to 1.5 million people in the US have heart attacks each year (about one every 20 seconds). Almost a third will die, including 75,000 people between the ages of 35 and 65. 1 out of every 5 men will have a heart attack before age 60.

The slow process of coronary artery disease often begins in adolescence or earlier. Dr. Robert Cooke, a pediatrician formerly with Johns Hopkins and a founder of the NICHD, pointed out that atherosclerosis should be considered a pediatric disease, and pediatricians should look for its signs in children whose families have a history of heart disease risk factors. Other risk factors include obesity, elevated blood pressure, serum total cholesterol, serum low-density lipoprotein cholesterol, and serum triglyceride concentrations.

What better gift can you give your children than continued good health? If your family has a history of heart disease, your pediatrician can do some simple blood tests to find out if your child has an increased risk of atherosclerosis. For more information, call Columbia County's healthy Heart Program at 828-3358 ext. 1314 or 1315.