Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

Cardiovascular rehabilitation saves lives. According to the American Heart Association, a recent study shows that cardiac death is lower and there are fewer second heart attacks in patients who are exercise-trained compared with those who receive "usual care."

In this column, Patricia Toye, RN, BSN, answers common questions about the Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation program at Lahey Clinic.

Patricia Toye, RN, BSN

What is cardiovascular rehabilitation?

Cardiovascular rehabilitation is a medically supervised, multidisciplinary program that includes exercise, lifestyle changes, education and support for patients after a cardiac event has occurred. The goals of the program are to improve the physical and psychosocial well-being of cardiac patients, while limiting the progression of coronary artery disease.

Who should participate in the program?

Patients who have had a cardiac event or a qualifying diagnosis can be referred to the cardiovascular rehabilitation program by their physician. Examples of a cardiac event include, but are not limited to, post-bypass surgery, heart attack, angina and coronary artery disease.

What does the program involve?

The program consists of an entrance evaluation, an education component, and an exercise program.

First, the participant meets with a member of each discipline involved with his or her treatment. The program provides access to physicians, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, psychologists, dietitians and an exercise therapist.

Next, a stress test is administered to help determine the participant's "exercise prescription." Finally, the team of specialists formulates an individualized treatment plan to meet the specific needs of the participant.

The education portion of the program helps to promote a heart healthy lifestyle. We hold a weekly educational lecture that covers topics such as nutrition, coping strategies and cardiovascular medications. A six-week stress management program is also included.

What are the goals of the exercise component?

The cardiovascular rehabilitation program incorporates a 12-week exercise program. Patients come in to the clinic two to three times a week for one hour. The hour consists of a warm-up, aerobic exercise and a cool-down period, followed by a relaxation session. Treadmills, a rowing machine, stationary bicycles and free weights are available to use. The goal of the program is to improve functional capacity and optimize quality of life.

What are the health benefits?

There are countless health benefits, starting with improvements in physical health. Exercise helps people maintain and control weight, while giving them a general sense of well-being. Some participants report that they sleep better, while other benefits of daily exercise include improvement in psychosocial health, and regaining the confidence to resume daily activities. Cardiovascular rehabilitation also helps to promote the regression of coronary artery disease.

For some participants, smoking cessation is a benefit. Our program refers those people to a smoking cessation support group, which teaches them to identify triggers for smoking and encourages them to pick a date to quit.

What are the long-term benefits?

After participants have completed the clinical program, they can still stay connected to our resources. A Cardiovascular Rehabilitation Education Support Group meets every month at Lahey Clinic.

Also, the education learned throughout the program will always be useful. Information about the cardiovascular system, a healthy diet, exercise and stress management will continue to help participants reduce their risk factors for heart problems in the future.

For more information about Lahey's Cardiovascular Rehabilitation program, ask your physician or call 781-744-2460.