

Health research and you

Heart disease

The disease

Cardiovascular disease (including heart disease and stroke) accounts for over a third of deaths in Australia. It is also a major cause of disability, with 1.4 million Australians suffering some form of disability associated with the disease.

Major heart diseases include coronary heart disease (heart attack and angina), heart failure and rheumatic heart disease.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE "AUSTRALIA'S HEALTH 2008" www.aihw.gov.au

Why invest?

According to Access Economics, cardiovascular disease cost the health system nearly \$4 billion in 2005. Lost productivity due to illness and premature death caused by cardiovascular disease imposes further costs to our health system in the billions.

Advances in treatment and prevention are having a real impact. Australian health research and development between 1992 and 2005 has been found to have produced wellbeing benefits worth \$36 billion. Increasing our research effort to discover better treatments and interventions will have even bigger returns.

SOURCE: ACCESS ECONOMICS "EXCEPTIONAL RETURNS" (2008) www.asmr.org.au

Who benefits?

Before he was diagnosed with heart disease, George Younan knew something was wrong but put it down to work-related stress. At the time he was playing competitive squash and thought of himself as extremely fit so he had no reason to think there was something wrong with his heart.

"I just thought it was stress related, due to work commitments," he recalls.

He only realised the danger he was in when he was driving to work and felt himself blacking out. That was the trigger to see a doctor.

After appointments with doctors and specialists, he was diagnosed with heart disease and was eventually implanted with an artificial pacemaker and defibrillator. Since then, this device has assisted him in his day to day activities, otherwise he may not be here to tell his story.

Research spanning 100 years has led to the development of the artificial pacemaker, which has saved countless lives. Research has also driven continued advancements to the device. The Heart Foundation has been instrumental in supporting research related to the use and development of the pacemaker in Australia.

George is a devoted supporter and volunteer for the Heart Foundation.

Heart disease and you

The best ways to reduce the risk of developing heart disease, and to help prevent it getting worse if it already exists, are to improve or remove the risk factors over which we have some control, and take all medications as prescribed by the doctor.

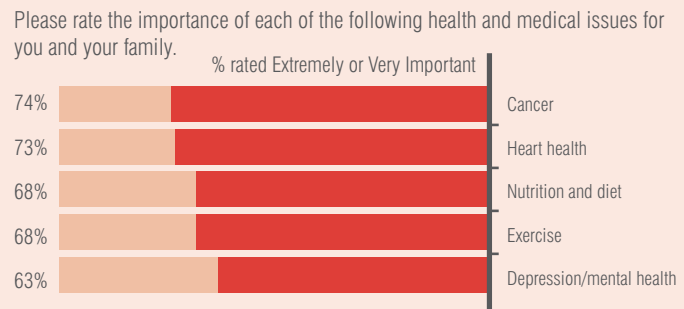
- Be smoke-free
- Enjoy healthy eating
- Be physically active
- Control your blood pressure
- Achieve a healthy weight

For heart health information call 1300 36 27 87 or www.heartfoundation.org.au

SOURCE: THE HEART FOUNDATION

Your say

Research Australia's Public Opinion Poll 2007, conducted by Crosby | Textor, showed heart disease was a major concern for Australians. Of those surveyed, 73 per cent considered heart health as a major medical concern.



Research Australia

An alliance for discoveries in health



Investment in heart disease research

The Australian Government's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funds a considerable amount of research into heart disease. In 2007, the NHMRC provided \$85 million to cardiovascular disease research. Major research areas include atherosclerosis, risk factors and blood pressure.

SOURCE: NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL www.nhmrc.gov.au

The non-government sector also supports Australian research into heart disease. The Heart Foundation is the largest non-government funder of cardiovascular research in Australia. In 2008, the Heart Foundation allocated \$12 million to research in this area and over 50 years it has invested \$189 million. This equates to a value of \$1.51 billion from improved cardiovascular health.

New discoveries

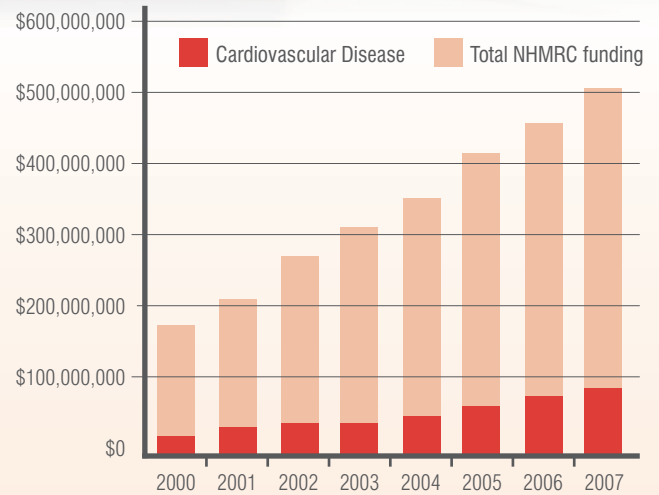
Australian researchers are working to improve our knowledge of heart disease and how to prevent and treat it. Research supported by the Heart Foundation has made a number of important breakthroughs including:

- demonstration that passive smoking leads to heart disease risk
- development of new drugs to treat high blood pressure, heart failure, kidney damage and blood vessel disease – now taken by millions of people worldwide
- new tools to diagnose high blood pressure in pregnant women
- more effective use of blood thinning agents to prevent strokes
- new treatments for lowering cholesterol
- use of imaging techniques to identify blocked and diseased arteries
- better recognition and selection of patients to receive pacemakers
- development of the first public health messages to warn and educate people about signs of heart attack

There is still much we do not know about heart disease and research is ongoing in a number of critical areas:

- understanding the link between cardiovascular disease and depression
- investigating the effects of fish oil on the heart
- interventions to treat and prevent rheumatic heart disease among urban Australian Aboriginal people
- understanding how high salt diets contribute to cardiovascular disease

NHMRC Cardiovascular Disease Funding



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