

Your Pharmacist and You: Preventing Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular (CV) disease is a major health concern in America, causing 1 of every 3 deaths. With over 2 million heart attacks and strokes each year, cardiovascular disease causes an enormous loss of life and carries a huge financial burden for our country, accounting for about \$1 of every \$6 spent on health care. Hypertension (high blood pressure) and hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol) are primary contributing CV health risks. These two conditions combined affect more than 80 million Americans annually.

Medications play an important role in treating these diseases, and there is a need for health care delivery models that focus on improving patient medication adherence, particularly in “silent diseases” such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Improved medication adherence in these patients will reduce risk for future CV events, improve patient outcomes and reduce overall health care costs.

Pharmacists are ideally positioned to help manage blood pressure and cholesterol medication therapy and assist patients in taking control of their cardiovascular health by adhering to their medication regimens. A few “heart healthy” services a pharmacist may provide to help prevent a heart attack, control heart disease and improve knowledge about effective treatment include:

- Pharmacists are the first point-of-contact when a patient receives a medication, and therefore in a prime position to ensure the patient understands and is confident about their medication regimen, including offering medication education, guidance on medication interactions, dosing instructions and side effects and helping the patient understand why complying with the prescriber’s medication instructions is important.
- Pharmacists discuss with patients the best way to make their medication regimen fit their daily routine, and can prepare medications in containers to assist patients in remembering to take their medications.
- Pharmacists may provide blood pressure screenings to the public, including patient consultations on interpreting the blood pressure reading.
- Pharmacists collaborate with physicians by referring those patients with higher than normal blood pressure readings to their physicians for diagnosis.
- Pharmacists may provide point-of-care testing directly at the pharmacy to evaluate LDL or “bad cholesterol” and other lab values to determine risk of having a cardiovascular event (like a stroke or heart attack).
- Pharmacists may provide glucose screenings and diabetes management counseling to patients with diabetes. Living with diabetes increases a patient’s chances for high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke.
- Pharmacists can provide smoking cessation counseling. Smoking increases the risk of many heart related complications, including heart attack and stroke.
- Pharmacists provide guidance on the right over-the counter medication for a condition and can help a patient decide whether an aspirin therapy may be right for them and which aspirin to choose in collaboration with the patient’s healthcare providers. This is helpful as there OTC medications that people with cardiovascular problems should avoid. Pharmacists can also offer guidance on herbal supplement usage.
- Pharmacists can provide counseling on diet, exercise and lifestyle modifications that can lead to a healthier heart.
- Pharmacists in a grocery-store setting can provide “grocery-shopping” tours to counsel patients on what ingredients to avoid and what nutrients are essential to a healthy heart.
- Pharmacists can help patients communicate with their healthcare and insurance providers, as well as help them access tools, organizations and information that may help save money.

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- Pharmacists can help find the right formulation of a medication for each patient. Some patients may have trouble swallowing pills, a pharmacist may be able to ‘compound’ or create a specialty liquid formulation for them.
- Pharmacists can provide regular medication check-ups (Medication Therapy Management services – MTM) to ensure patients understand all of their medications, why they are taking them and the dosing and timing instructions, check for possible interactions between all prescription, over-the-counter and herbal supplements, confirm there are no duplications in the regimen and provide guidance on managing their medications effectively.
- Pharmacists can help ensure that patients get all necessary immunizations to keep them healthy.
- Pharmacists can help patients make a personal “medication list,” which is an up-to-date list of all the patient’s medications, over-the-counter products, vitamins, supplements and vaccinations. This list is should be updated regularly and shared with all the patient’s healthcare providers.

In recent years, APhA, The APhA Foundation and the APhA Academy of Student Pharmacists have conducted several studies and projects involving pharmacists in cardiovascular health. These studies include:

- [Project ImPACT: Hypertension](#) – Launched in 2011, Project ImPACT Hypertension is a one year demonstration project from the APhA Foundation in collaboration with Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. The project’s objectives are to improve the identification of patients with hypertension (high blood pressure), improve adherence to medication create a value-based high blood pressure benefit, assist patients with high blood pressure to achieve national treatment goals and measure patient satisfaction. Over 90 patients are enrolled and receiving care from pharmacists; this model involves patients, pharmacists, physicians and other providers collaborating to improve cardiovascular health.
- [Operation Heart](#) - Launched in 2010, Operation Heart is a national patient care program that supports the development of student-led community projects which will address and prevent cardiovascular disease. Students work to encourage lifestyle modifications, monitor associated risk factors and provide specific education about medications for heart disease. During the first six months of the program, student pharmacists conducted 601 community events that screened over 63,000 individuals for risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease and educated 1.7 million through public relations efforts.
- [The Asheville Project](#) – Ongoing since 1996, The Asheville Project was an independent effort by the City of Asheville, North Carolina, to provide education and personal oversight for employees with chronic health problems such as diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Patients were teamed with community pharmacists who ensured they were using their medications correctly.
- [Project ImPACT: Hyperlipidemia](#) – Launched in 1996 and completed in 1999, the Foundation’s first national demonstration project was a landmark study that showed the value of an innovative point-of-care technology combined with a process of care that includes collaboration among patients, pharmacists, physicians and other health care providers.

For more information, please visit www.pharmacist.com or www.aphafoundation.org.

About the [American Pharmacists Association](#)

The American Pharmacists Association, founded in 1852 as the American Pharmaceutical Association, is a 501 (c)(6) organization, representing more than 62,000 practicing pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, student pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and others interested in advancing the profession. APhA, dedicated to helping all pharmacists improve medication use and advance patient care, is the first-established and largest association of pharmacists in the United States.