

# Preventive cardiac care

How technology can help to maintain your coronary health **Interviewed by Leslie Stevens-Huffman**

**M**ore than 700,000 Americans have their first heart attack and 500,000 have a repeat episode each year, according to the statistics on the Web site of the American Heart Association.

CEOs often represent the demographic group at the greatest risk for heart attacks because 49 percent of males will develop coronary heart disease after age 40, as will 32 percent of females. While diet, exercise, quitting smoking and stress management can help reduce the chances of developing coronary heart disease, new technology can help find and fix potential problems before a heart attack actually occurs.

More than 60 percent of the people who come into the emergency room during a heart attack have never had any previous symptoms, says Oscar Matthews, M.D., medical director of the Cardiac Cath Lab at Western Medical Center Anaheim.

*Smart Business* spoke with Matthews about the best way for CEOs to insure cardiac health through lifestyle and a proactive testing regimen.

## What are the best ways for CEOs to prevent heart disease?

Eating a healthy diet and exercising are very important in maintaining a healthy heart. Due to the nature of their jobs, CEOs have the frequent opportunity to eat meals that can be higher in fat and calories. It is always advised to eat slowly and take small bites. This helps 'fool the brain' into thinking that your stomach is actually fuller than it really is, so it is important not to rush through meals.

Also, stress reduction is very important for executives. You need to set aside time for relaxation, which is accompanied by positive imaging and doesn't include thoughts about work or pending business deals.

## What types of diagnostic testing can help spot heart disease in its early stages?

One of the basic tests is the treadmill. The executive is connected to a monitor while walking on a treadmill. Gradually,



**Oscar Matthews, M.D.**  
Medical director, Cardiac Cath Lab  
Western Medical Center Anaheim

the speed of the treadmill is increased while heart rate, breathing and how quickly you become fatigued are monitored. These types of tests have been around for a while, but electrocardiogram tests alone are less than 60 percent effective in diagnosing coronary heart disease.

## What is nuclear testing and how is it used?

We inject isotopes into the patient's vein during a session of rigorous exercise. We are then able to capture sophisticated images of the heart, and — as the isotope passes through the bloodstream — we are able to capture images of the cardiac muscle itself. The images are analyzed for potential defects. A normal cardiac muscle almost resembles a doughnut.

If part of the muscle is not receiving a good supply of blood, we will be able to see it in the image, because it almost appears to look like a hole in the doughnut.

## What happens if the test reveals problems?

If the imaging reveals potential blockages in the arteries, a coronary angiogram can be conducted to determine the extent of the blockage. A small puncture

is made in the groin and, using a catheter as fine as a hair, we advance into the chambers of the heart and the coronary arteries. There we inject contrast media (dye) into the catheter and illuminate the coronary arteries of the heart for imaging. If we find that the arteries are less than 50 percent blocked, we normally recommend behavior modification, send the patient home, and continue to monitor his or her progress annually.

If we find that the arteries are 51 percent to 70 percent blocked, we can insert a balloon from the tip of the catheter for small arteries and repair the problem on the spot by opening up the blocked area.

With larger arteries, or in cases where the artery is more than 70 percent blocked, an option might be to implant a stent. The stent is a device that helps to hold the artery open and prevent it from re-closing. We place a sealer on the groin after the procedure, and most patients are able to go home in three hours.

## How often should CEOs be tested?

Executives should plan on being tested every two years after the age of 40, especially if you are overweight, smoke or have other high risk factors. The test should be conducted using state-of-the-art equipment, high-quality isotopes and should be read by an expert in nuclear cardiology, which are all available at Western Medical Center Anaheim. This type of testing improves the level of diagnostic accuracy up to 90 percent. With the diagnostic options available today, most executives owe it to themselves to seek the peace of mind and pro-active treatments that can prevent a fatal heart attack before it occurs.

**OSCAR MATTHEWS, M.D.**, is the medical director of the Cardiac Cath Lab at Western Medical Center Anaheim. For more information about cardiac health or executive physical assessments, e-mail [wmcahearts@ihhioc.com](mailto:wmcahearts@ihhioc.com) or visit the Web site [www.westernmedanaheim.com](http://www.westernmedanaheim.com).

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