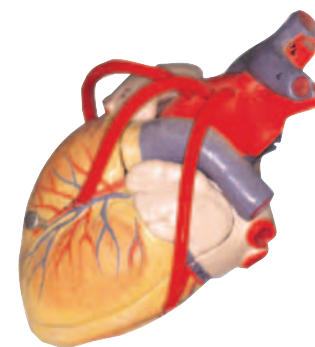


Is Your HEART HEALTHY?



Guidelines to ensure that you never miss a beat

BY GLENN BRODIE

What is it about the heart? It can be broken without ever bleeding. It can be stolen without fear of arrest.

And while the brain is associated with thinking, it's the heart that gets the job of feeling.

Though technically just a big muscle designed to pump blood through the body, it's the organ most associated with deep emotion, both good and bad.

There's another thing about the heart. Our time-honored symbol of the heart doesn't, in fact, look anything like the real deal. According to the Symbols.com website, that representation is believed to be the combination of two Middle Age symbols, one the sign of Aries and the other the sign for fire or flight.

Now when you add an arrow through that symbol it doesn't mean death or destruction. No, it means true love, thanks to Cupid, the mischievous Goddess of Love.

But love songs, clever slogans and ancient symbols aside, the real heart is a fascinating marvel of design.

A human being's heart is about the size of a human being's fist. In its fetal form the heart is just a tube that grows so quickly it needs more space, so it bends and twists back, forming the familiar shape.

To best understand the heart, and why its associated diseases currently account for one out of every 2.6 deaths in the United States, it helps to know some basic anatomy.

The heart is primarily a shell made up of four cavities – creating two pumps. The left side of the heart houses one atrium and one ventricle, the right side houses the others. The ventricles meet at the bottom of the heart to form a pointed base (which actually makes the heart look more like an upside-down pear). The left ventricle contracts the most forcefully, which is why you can best feel your heart pumping on the left side of your chest.

The top of the heart connects to the aorta, which carries nutrient-rich blood out to the rest of the body. Deoxygenated blood returning from the body is pumped through the right side of the heart into the pulmonary artery, which leads to the lungs.

The heart maintains the constant cycle of oxygen-rich blood flowing from the lungs through the body, with the de-oxygenated blood being returned through the heart and back into the lungs to be re-oxygenated to start all over again. It will pump approximately five quarts of blood each minute at rest. But, during exercise it can pump as much as 37 quarts per minute. The blood volume of an average 150-pound man is about six quarts.

Initiating each cardiac muscle contraction - or heartbeat - is an electrical impulse created in the heart's own version of a modern-day pacemaker. After each electrical impulse - and resulting contraction - is a period of rest during which time the electrical system and the heart muscle are recharged and made ready for the next beat.

The familiar beeping of a heart monitor, and the jagged lines of an