

Do You Know Your Heart Disease Risk?

When it comes to your heart health, it's good to keep score. Your heart disease risk is too important for guessing games, and now cardiologists at OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute are encouraging patients to get the facts.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. According to the American Heart Association, 1 in 4 deaths is caused by heart disease. However, while genetic factors do play a part in cardiovascular disease, it can often be prevented.

To aid in that prevention, OSF Cardiovascular Institute is offering patients a unique look at their individual heart health with a 10-year heart disease risk score.

"Patients come in and have a one-time consultation with their cardiologist," explained Dr. Timir Baman, Cardiologist, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute. He continued, "The cardiologist looks at a variety of things: your blood pressure, your cholesterol, your age, do you have diabetes, were you ever a smoker. And they can come up with a ten year risk score, in other words, what chance do you have of having a cardiac event over 10 years."

Dr. Baman says the 10-year risk score, or atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) risk estimate, is a way for patients to lower their chances of a heart attack by knowing where they stand when it comes to heart health.

"It never hurts to get information. Knowing what your 10 year risk score is, is a piece of information. What the patient decides, or what the community decides to do with that information, that's up to them. But at least be informed. At least know where you stand, and at least know, are there things that you can consider to reduce that risk," said Dr. Baman.

To get started, all a patient needs is a simple blood test called a lipid panel. Cardiologist can then examine a patient's "good" cholesterol (HDL) and "bad" cholesterol (LDL), and couple that with blood pressure and clinical history. According to Dr. Baman, it all boils down to prevention.

"Prevention is the key," he said. "It is so much better for the community if we can identify patients who are at above average risk, and try and reduce that risk rather than waiting for that heart attack, waiting for that hospitalization or that stent and then having to deal with the repercussions there after."

After a patient is analyzed, heart disease prevention methods could be discussed. A patient with above-average risk of a heart event may be prescribed a cholesterol-lowering drug called a statin. Other possible lifestyle changes may also be discussed, such as losing weight, quitting smoking or increasing activity.

A patient with moderate risk may also receive a coronary CT scan, which is a quick test to determine if a patient has early blockages in his or her arteries. A plan can then be made to prevent those blockages from progressing.

For more information or to schedule an appointment for a 10-year heart disease risk score, call (800) 352-4410.