

Rebellious Wellness^{over 50}

The Heart is One Muscle You Can't Live Without



Episode 44: The Heart is One Muscle You Cannot Live Without with Gregory Anne Cox

Hey girls today, we're talking about the heart. Did you ever think about the fact that the heart is the one muscle we cannot live without? This little pump never sleeps. And every hour, your heart pushes around 70 gallons of blood and it has to fight gravity and our bad habits, like sitting too much, to get it to the far reaches of our bodies, head to toe.

It's pretty amazing that it lasts as long as it does.

Some of course last longer than others and that's why I'm talking about the heart, blood pressure, and listening to the heart.

Here's a fun fact. Even with all the improvements in health care, since the 19 hundreds, you are 70% more likely to die from heart disease today than you were then. Why? Well, other things used to kill people first in part, but also because a hundred years ago, people didn't spend five or six hours every day on the couch binge-watching Succession, driving to get their food, and fitfully sleeping or not sleeping.

We've been told to take care of our health to take care of our heart but sometimes bad things happen not matter what we do. Like this

Twenty-five percent of people who die of heart failure, the first time they know they have a heart problem is when they die.

And this

More than half of all first heart attacks, fatal or otherwise, occur in people who are fit and healthy and have no obvious risks like smoking, drinking to excess, they're not seriously overweight. They didn't even have high blood pressure or high cholesterol reading.

[00:01:22] Twice as many of us die from heart disease than we do breast cancer and yet we fear cancer more.

Some scary stuff but not the most common reasons we die of a heart attack or heart failure. The most common problems stem from things within our control like what we do every day.

Two places to start, manage high blood pressure and learn to manage blood sugar so you don't end up with insulin resistance.

Many people take it for granted that as we age, our blood pressure is going to go up. You may have even heard that that's acceptable. And for years, the medical community believed that it was good to have higher blood pressure as we age so that the blood would still reach our brains and our extremities, even with hardening of our arteries.

Now we know that's not the best case scenario. We know now that chronically elevated blood pressure seriously raises the rate of heart attack and stroke.

As we age, it is likely to go up unless we adjust our lifestyle habits to reflect the proven ways to keep it low. In part that is due to a decline in estrogen but also we tend to become more sedentary.

When I was in my fifties, I was pretty cavalier about my blood pressure cause mine was always low, like lower than 120 over 80, which is what they recommend. And yet when I hit 60, even though I was active and eating well,

Sticking to the 80/20 rule of Excess in moderation, something changed. My BP began to creep up. I didn't take it seriously though, until it hit 130 over 90, how could this be happening? At the time I was gardening and walking, but clearly that was not enough. I kicked up the pace of my walks and I learned to love spin classes and Barre classes.

These days, my blood pressure lives in the 115 over 75 range. Upping my cardio worked for me. I didn't change anything else except perhaps I'm more mindful of blowing off steam and including some yoga. You'll have to figure out what will work for you. In future episodes I'll be discussing ways to lower BP.

If yours is a concern right now and you are not ready to start on meds, check out my Power of 5 assessment at RWO etc. I'm not an alternative to a medical professional if your BP is high, anything over 135/80 – 89. But I can take an in depth look at your current lifestyle habits and give guidance and support.

What I did is not going to work for everybody, nor does everybody want to spin or power walk nor can they. Our lifestyle is responsible for 80% of our health and how we age but movement is the one thing that all medical professionals agree we must do. Peeps, we have to move more.

I mentioned lifestyle and insulin resistance up top. Time for a short primer on insulin.

You probably know that insulin is related to blood sugar. When we eat or get stressed, our blood sugar rises. Insulin comes in to distribute it to our cells, if there is excess, or our cells aren't responding because they are overworked from too much sugar, it will get it into storage for later.

Too much sugar guarantees more insulin circulating until it's no longer needed.

When you control your blood sugar—more on how to do that in a later episode—your body makes the right amount of insulin. Why you don't want excess insulin swimming around? It increases the risk of heart disease and the risk for

hypertension, diabetes, inflammatory diseases, even possibly cancer. Too much insulin results in a condition known as insulin resistance, and you can be guaranteed that something bad is up ahead.

According to doctors Jonny, Bowden, and Steven Sinatra quote "insulin resistance is one of the most important and early signs of coming heart disease. High levels of insulin will increase your blood pressure and a couple of ways for one thing, insulin can narrow the artery walls. Narrow walls translate into higher blood pressure because the harder pumping action is required to get the blood through the passageways."

The problem with high blood pressure is that we almost never know that it's high, hence the name "silent killer." Unless you're going to a doctor regularly or you've been advised to monitor it yourself you know know until something serious starts. High blood pressure can result not only an artery damage, but an aneurysm, heart failure, rupture or blocked blood vessels, reduced kidney function, vision loss, loss of cognitive function and metabolic syndrome.

There are no common symptoms as blood pressure increases, but warning signs for very high blood pressure can include chest pain, confusion, headaches. Ear buzzing and irregular heartbeat, nosebleeds, fatigue, and changes in your vision.

Here's my ask, if you're not already monitoring your blood pressure at home and you're over 55 get yourself a home monitor. It only takes a few minutes a day. And that way you can see get a baseline and keep track for the future.

My preference is a digital monitor that inflates the cuff and stores your readings with time and date. Wrist monitors or monitors on smart watches are not as accurate. You don't need to spend a fortune on one, \$40-\$70 will get you a reliable digital wireless monitor.

Ok here are the recommendations for getting an accurate reading.

Do this at the same time every day. At least to start doing every day.

[00:05:54] That'll give you a baseline.

If you're consistently high, greater than 130 over anything more than 80, then it's time to go see your doc.

If you don't want to take blood pressure medication, I'm with you, but then you got to commit to change. We all know our bad habits, what needs to go better? The

Doritos than the ticket. If you want some direction on small changes that will provide big results, get the power of five.

You can find it at [rebelliouswellness.com /power](http://rebelliouswellness.com/power) and the number five. They are my recommendations for the five pillars of longevity. They're super simple, not about crazy exercise and deprivation just in. Things that you can understand and put into your daily routine to help you age in good health.

If you're not sure how to pick a monitor check out consumer reports or Wirecutter. Make sure you get a cuff that's going to fit your upper arm.

Here's when not to take your readings:

right after arguing with customer service about your cable bill, finding out your tax refund is smaller than you planned or after a fitful night's sleep. Don't exercise, drink caffeinated beverages, smoke, or eat within 30 minutes of measuring your blood pressure.

Sit still with your back straight your feet on the floor. Rest your arm on a table or pillow on your lap so it's comfortably straight.

I'm going to tell you to turn your phone upside down or put it somewhere else. Why? Because anything can cause a spike in BP, even good things.

And then follow your monitor's instructions on how to whatever else you might need to do. Check your blood pressure at the same time each day, do it two to three times. Each time you sit down with a minute in between each reading. Take the average of the 3 if they are different and that's you for the day.

Your machine will probably track your numbers with the date. And the time. If you're into apps, there's likely an app and I'll just upload to your phone. So you can look back and see what's going on.

You might think that taking your BP at home is for old people. Well, it might make the difference between getting sick and feeling old vs taking a proactive approach and heading off any ills that can come our way because we weren't paying attention.

Prevention is underrated and this is one of the easiest prevention strategies, especially for those of us beyond the midpoint.

If your BP higher than is safe, get educated about how to bring it down naturally. Or go to your doctor and see what his or her opinion is.

[00:08:20] Some docs will suggest lifestyle changes before giving you blood pressure meds. That's the kind of doc I love.

Don't dismiss this simple prevention measure as for other people. Heart attacks are not necessarily more prominent in men than women. They're often more fatal. Plus women are more likely to have a second heart attack in the five to six years after their first one.

I don't want that for you. I don't want that for any of us. I want us to live fully until we decide not to. So please take care of your heart. The one muscle you cannot live without.