HEART DISEASE is the most frequent condition in older adults and the Number 1 cause of death

Adults aged 65 and older are more likely than younger people to suffer from cardiovascular disease, which is problems with the heart, blood vessels, or both. Aging can cause changes in the heart and blood vessels that may increase a person's risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

What is the most common heart disease in the elderly?

In people older than 75, congestive heart failure occurs 10 times more often than in younger adults. Coronary artery disease is common. It is usually a result of atherosclerosis. High blood pressure and orthostatic hypotension are more common with older age.

**HEART AND BLOOD VESSEL DISEASES**:

***Atherosclerosis*** is a condition that develops when a substance called plaque builds up in the walls of the arteries (think of a kinked water hose). This buildup narrows the arteries, making it harder for blood to flow through. If a blood clot forms, it can block the blood flow. This can cause a heart attack or stroke. Coronary arteries supply blood and oxygen to the muscles of the heart. With coronary artery disease, plaque first grows within the walls of the coronary arteries until the blood flow to the heart’s muscle is limited. A heart attack or myocardial infarction (MI) occurs when the blood flow to a part of the heart is blocked by a blood clot. If this clot cuts off the blood flow completely, the part of the heart muscle supplied by that artery begins to die.

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense. But most start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. A person should call 911 if they experience the following (early intervention by emergency medical workers is crucial):

* Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes – or it may go away and then return. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
* Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach.
* Shortness of breath. This can occur with or without chest discomfort.
* Other possible signs include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.
* As with men, women’s most common heart attack symptom is chest pain (angina) or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

***Angina*** is chest pain or discomfort caused when the heart muscle doesn't get enough oxygen-rich blood. It may feel like pressure or squeezing in a person’s chest. The discomfort also can occur in a person’s shoulders, arms, neck, jaw, or back. Angina pain may even feel like indigestion. Angina is a symptom of an underlying heart problem, usually coronary heart disease (CHD). Coronary heart disease is a common term for the buildup of plaque in the heart’s arteries that could lead to heart attack. There are many types of anginas, including stable and unstable angina.

***Congestive heart failure*** (CHF) is a type of heart failure which requires seeking timely medical attention, although sometimes the two terms are used interchangeably. As blood flow out of the heart slows, blood returning to the heart through the veins backs up, causing congestion in the body's tissues. Often swelling (edema) results. Most often there's swelling in the legs and ankles, but it can happen in other parts of the body, too. Sometimes fluid collects in the lungs and interferes with breathing, causing shortness of breath, especially when a person is lying down. This is called pulmonary edema and if left untreated can cause respiratory distress. Heart failure also affects the kidneys' ability to dispose of sodium and water. This retained water also increases swelling in the body's tissues (edema).

Physically, many people with heart failure often can't handle all the tasks they once could. They also must change their lives- eat differently, remember medications, pay close attention to their bodies and reduce stress.

**The In-Home Aide’s Role in Assisting a Client with Heart Disease**

**Heart Failure –** pay close attention to any changes in client symptoms. If you notice something new, or a sudden worsening of a current symptom with your client, report as instructed on the client plan of care. The symptoms could lead to emergency care if not treated.

Watch for”

* Rapid weight gain
* Shortness of breath, while at rest
* Increased swelling of the lower limbs
* Trouble sleeping (awakening short of breath, using more pillows)
* Frequent dry, hacking cough
* Loss of appetite
* Increased fatigue and feeling tired all the time
* Feeling of sadness such as depression

***If your client appears to be in cardiac arrest, know your agency policies and requirements for CPR, call 911, follow instructions, stay with the client until emergency services arrive, notify your supervisor and document appropriately.***

