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Updated secondary guidelines promote cardiac rehab, lifestyle changes

So, you're living with heart disease. Now what? This is the issue being addressed in new recommendations recently released by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology Foundation. These "Secondary Prevention Guidelines" directly focus on patients who are already living with heart disease, while the Primary Prevention Guidelines promote risk reduction for those who have not been diagnosed with heart disease. The Secondary Prevention Guidelines are designed to help reduce the risk of future heart attacks in patients who have already had a heart attack, stroke, coronary artery bypass surgery, balloon angioplasty or stent placement, by advising health care providers to regularly monitor their patients' health habits, and pays specific attention to the need for cardiac rehabilitation and depression screening.

"Unless improvements are made in your behavior and medical therapy, the same blood vessel problem that caused your first heart attack or stroke can occur again – and may result in death – so long-term changes need to be initiated to get the vascular disease under control," said Sidney C. Smith, Jr., M.D., a professor of medicine at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill who chaired the guideline writing group.

Here's a quick rundown of the new guidelines that your healthcare providers should be following at your future office visits:

- Asking if you are currently using tobacco products
- Checking your body mass index and waist circumference
- Discussing lifestyle modification — i.e. diet, exercise, work
- Encouraging you to engage in 30 - 60 minutes of moderate exercise at least five days a week (and preferably seven)
- Recommending a flu vaccination
- Establishing a lipid profile
- Discussing recommendations for aspirin therapy
- Screening for depression, particularly among patients who have had coronary artery bypass graft surgery or myocardial infarction
- Referring you for a comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation program following a heart attack, stroke, bypass operation or other surgery, heart-related chest pain or blockages in leg arteries

If your healthcare provider does not follow these guidelines, then go ahead and ask!

Resources:

Circulation: The Journal of the American Heart Association

<http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/early/2011/11/01/CIR.0b013e318235eb4d.full.pdf>

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Forbes Magazine: AHA and ACC Update Secondary Prevention Guidelines

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/larryhusten/2011/11/04/aha-and-acc-update-secondary-prevention-guidelines/>