



Peter Munk Cardiac Centre

Toronto General Hospital

### Heart Failure: Canada's No. 1 Killer

Heart failure is a condition of the heart in which the heart muscle becomes weak, requiring it to work harder to pump blood through the body. Heart failure develops following injury to the heart such as damage caused by a heart attack, a virus, long-term high blood pressure, or an abnormality of one of the heart valves.

Cardiovascular disease, which is also referred to as circulatory disease, leads to heart failure and accounts for the death of more Canadians than any other disease. Heart failure develops over a period of time depending on the causes leading to the degeneration of the heart muscle. Major risk factors include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, smoking, inactivity, heredity and stress.

Currently, over half a million Canadians suffer from some form of heart disease with over 50,000 being treated for advanced heart failure annually. Nearly 40 per cent of patients die within the first year of diagnosis. In 2002 (the latest year for which Statistics Canada has data), cardiovascular disease accounted for 74,626 Canadian deaths.

According to Health Canada's 1998 report, *Economic Burden of Illness in Canada*, cardiovascular diseases cost the Canadian economy over \$18 billion a year.

Heart disease is the primary cause of death in men over the age of 45 and in women over the age of 55. The most common signs are chest pain or discomfort, and difficulties in breathing. These symptoms may be mild to severe and may come or go, hence regular check-ups are imperative.

Transplantation is the only long-term treatment for heart patients suffering from end-stage heart failure. But not all patients are suitable candidates for a transplant and the long wait times for a matching donor organ make it necessary to find other alternatives. One alternative is an artificial heart or VAD (Ventricular Arterial Device) that prolongs life until a suitable donor can be found. Another possible alternative is the developing science of regenerative medicine that may enable the heart to heal itself. (Please see attached information on VAD and Regenerative Medicine)

For more information, please visit [www.testyourlimits-antarctica.ca](http://www.testyourlimits-antarctica.ca)

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