

TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEART

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Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death in Spain today, accounting for almost 30% of all deaths, just above cancer. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), diseases that affect the heart and blood vessels are the leading cause of death in the world.

In relation to gender involvement, in women it has become the leading cause of death, killing 10,000 more women than men a year. Approximately one in five women in Europe dies from cardiovascular disease. On the other hand, it is known that cardiovascular involvement in women is usually more aggressive and with a worse prognosis compared to men. The probability of a woman having a heart attack is more frequent after menopause, a time when the production of female hormones (which have acted as protection) is reduced and a greater alteration of cholesterol, glucose and tension levels usually occurs

The importance of prevention

80% of deaths could be avoided by following good life habits, which slow the emergence and accumulation of risk factors. According to the Spanish Heart Foundation (FEC), these are the main cardiac risk factors that we can control:

- **Hypertension:** this pathology supposes a greater resistance for the heart, which can cause coronary insufficiency and angina of chest, besides that the cardiac muscle becomes more irritable and more arrhythmias take place. It also promotes the onset of atherosclerosis. To prevent hypertension from appearing, the recommended non-pharmacological measures are to avoid tobacco and excessive consumption of alcohol, reduce salt at meals, practice sports and follow a balanced diet consuming fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts in small amounts and whole grains, in addition to using olive oil as the main fat and increasing the consumption of poultry and fish to the detriment of red meats.
- **High cholesterol levels:** it is estimated that people with blood cholesterol levels above 240 have twice the risk of myocardial infarction as those with figures of 200. The main reason is that when cells are unable to absorb all the cholesterol circulating in the blood, the excess is deposited in the wall of the artery and contributes to its progressive narrowing, causing atherosclerosis. To control these levels, it is essential to have a balanced and healthy diet, with a low content of saturated fats, as well as regular exercise.
- **High heart rate:** as a rule, the normal resting rate ranges between 50 and 100 beats per minute, but above these figures the cardiac risk increases. This is evidenced by the studies that have found an association between high heart rate and the risk of death. To reduce this, one of the main recommendations is to play sports: it is calculated that each week of aerobic training, a reduction in the resting heart rate of one heartbeat per minute could be achieved. There are also drugs to reduce the heart rate if necessary.

- **Type 2 diabetes:** if we prevent the onset of type 2 diabetes in people with risk factors to develop it, we will be reducing at the same time the chances that cardiovascular health will be affected in the future. For this, it is essential to follow a healthy lifestyle, taking care of the weight and, at the same time, maintain a heart-healthy diet combined with the practice of sports on a regular basis.
- **Periodontal disease:** the relationship between the mouth and the heart is narrower than what was imagined until recently, and the proof is that among people with ischemic heart disease in Spain, around 40% have already suffered tooth loss. Therefore, the care of periodontal disease is beneficial for cardiovascular health, because by ensuring the good condition of our mouth, we will also take care of the heart.



We are as old as our arteries are

The more risk factors we allow, the greater the chances of suffering cardiovascular disease. This is inevitable if our blood has a tendency to coagulate and arteries are hampered by deposits (plaques), which prevent the normal circulation of blood. This material that blocks the blood vessels is a substance composed of fibrin, collagen, phospholipids, triglycerides, cholesterol, mucopolysaccharides, proteins, heavy metals, muscle tissue and other waste, all solidified with calcium, which deforms the arteries and causes them to occlude with time, causing atherosclerosis.

A healthy diet, exercising moderately and avoiding alcohol and tobacco significantly reduce the number of these 'risk factors'.

The extract of black garlic as a cardio-protector

In addition to conventional therapies, there are some foods and nutritional components that have been shown to be effective in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular diseases. Among these foods, garlic (*Allium sativum* L.) has a strong reputation for centuries in various cultures, for its antithrombotic and antihypertensive properties. The latter are due, at least in part, to the active principle S-allyl-cysteine (SAC), which reduces oxidative and inflammatory stress and enhances the release of vasodilator substances, such as nitric oxide (NO) and hydrogen sulfide (H₂S). Both substances are produced by vascular endothelial cells and play an important role in the regulation of vascular tone.

Unlike conventional garlic, black garlic extract contains a higher content of polyphenols, polyunsaturated fatty acids, such as linolenic acid, and sulfur compounds, especially SAC, which gives it a greater antioxidant capacity. There are several investigations that show the ability of black garlic extract to take care of our circulatory system: it improves blood circulation, reduces blood pressure, decreases platelet aggregation, prevents lipid oxidation, reduces homocysteine levels, prevents the progression of atherosclerosis (coronary artery calcification) and helps regulate blood glucose, triglyceride and cholesterol levels. Therefore, the extract of black garlic has shown an important preventive effect of cardiovascular diseases.

Adopt a healthy attitude

Maintain a healthy lifestyle, periodically review cardiovascular health, stop smoking, reduce alcohol consumption, incorporate aerobic exercise on a regular basis, such as walking 20-30 minutes each day, control weight, plan menus, follows a varied and balanced diet based on fruits, vegetables, legumes, cereals, nuts, olive oil and blue fish and avoids the consumption of processed foods with high content of saturated fats, refined sugars and salt.

Get enough rest and learn to manage emotions well, since studies show that feelings such as anger, frustration, guilt and of course, chronic stress, accelerate cellular aging and increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Therefore, a calm mind and good humor will help us to protect our heart and feel better. Mindfulness meditation, yoga or hypnosis help us to better manage our emotions and stress situations.

These healthy lifestyle habits accompanied by supplementation with concentrated extract of black garlic will have a very beneficial effect in preventing cardiovascular diseases and taking care of our heart.

