

Building confidence of health care professionals to provide diet and lifestyle support for CVD prevention: We can make it work!

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), the leading global cause of morbidity and mortality, results from a lifelong process. Thus, prevention strategies for risk reduction should begin early in life. A healthy diet and lifestyle are vital for the management of dyslipidaemia and CVD prevention.

The EAS/ESC guidelines for the management of dyslipidaemias and for CVD prevention in clinical practice emphasise the importance of diet and lifestyle and provide recommendations (1,2). The role of diet is highlighted by data from the Copenhagen Heart Study which indicated cardiovascular mortality was 30% higher in individuals with very low adherence to dietary guidelines compared with those with very high adherence (3).

A Healthy Diet and Lifestyle: How to bring the message to patients?

A recent Danish study published earlier this year found that incorporating dietary assessment instead of LDL-cholesterol levels into ten-year risk charts for CVD could enhance patients' motivation for adopting a healthy diet (4,5). Hence, risk charts including dietary assessment could be an additional visual aid for health care professionals when discussing diet and lifestyle habits and could help in motivating patients to adopt and adhere to a healthy diet and lifestyle recommendations. Non-adherence to dietary guidelines was also associated with an atherogenic lipid and inflammatory profile in the prospective Copenhagen General Population Study (5).

The successful implementation of 'diet and lifestyle' advice, however, relies not only on the knowledge of health care professionals, but also on their efforts to provide such advice and to effectively educate their patients.

In fact, dietary advice is not always systematically provided to CVD patients as was found in a recent survey using data from 27 (non)European countries participating in the fifth wave of the EUROASPIRE study (EUROASPIRE V) (6). Interestingly, the survey also showed that the more frequent patients receive dietary advice, the more they reported changes made in their dietary habits (6).

What can help to support the conversation with patients?

There is a need to improve the implementation of diet and lifestyle advice given by health care professionals based on recommendations summarised in the guidelines in everyday practice, both for patients with CVD as well as for individuals at risk of developing CVD.

There are practical educational materials and resources available for health care professionals such as for instance the educational tool "Diet at the heart of CVD prevention" <https://www.dietattheheart.com/>, which is hosted under "Apps, tools & resources" at the EAS website. The tool includes useful downloadable materials such as a patient fact sheet, a food diary, a leaflet with tips for healthy cooking, helping patients to assess their own habits, identify areas for improvement and initiate behaviour changes. Take advantage of these resources to provide diet and lifestyle support for your patients.

References

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