

# Heart TALK

Heart-healthy and Stroke-free Living with Dr. Amy L. Doneen, DNP, ARNP

November 2019



*Thoughts from  
Dr. Amy*

## **Bernie Sanders' Heart Attack: Could It Have Been Prevented?**

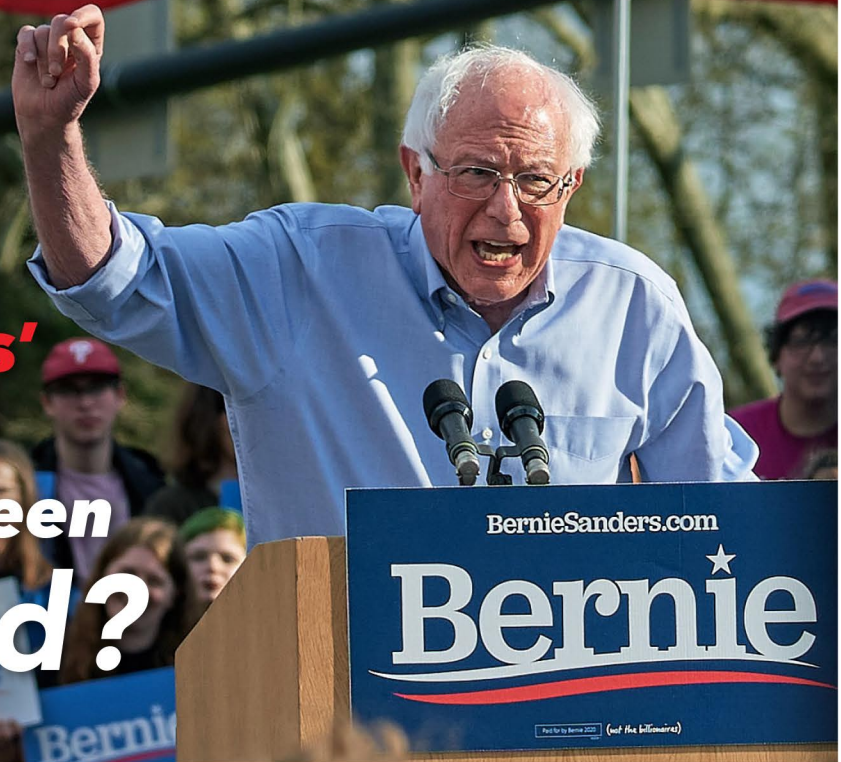


PHOTO BY VIDAR NORDLI-MATHISEN ON UNSPLASH

Now back on the campaign trail after suffering a heart attack in October, Sen. Bernie Sanders faces ongoing questions about his health. “‘Heart attack’ is a scary word,” the 78-year-old acknowledged during an interview on ABC’s “This Week.” However, he emphasized that he was “feeling very well,” and was confident in the care he’d received, which included implanting two stents to reopen a blocked coronary artery.

Prior to the heart attack, Sanders, like 70% of people who suffer these events, was apparently unaware that he was in any cardiac danger. In 2016, he released a letter from his doctor saying that he had no history of cardiovascular disease (CVD), a condition that claims the lives of 2,300 Americans every day — one every 38 seconds. Yet these tragedies don’t have to happen. Please join us in the fight against this stealthy assassin by reading and sharing this important message: CVD can be detected, halted and even reversed with

proper diagnosis and treatment!

### **Heart Attacks and Strokes Are Preventable**

Every 34 seconds someone in the U.S. has a heart attack or stroke. Very often, people who suffer these events were previously unaware they had CVD, the leading killer of men and women. The BaleDoneen Method offers a unique, precision-medicine approach to detecting, preventing and treating CVD that has been shown in [two recent peer-reviewed studies](#) to halt or reverse

the disease — and rapidly shrink arterial plaque by more than 50 percent.

How do we achieve these results? Unlike standard care, which is based on checking patients for certain risk factors, the BaleDoneen Method also uses advanced laboratory and imaging tests to directly check all patients for hidden signs of arterial disease, which often develops silently over many years until it gets severe enough to trigger a heart attack or stroke if untreated.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**



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# ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION:

## A RED FLAG FOR HEART ATTACK AND STROKE RISK – AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT



**M**en who struggle with erectile dysfunction (ED) should have their cardiovascular health checked. Compared to men without ED, those who have it are nearly twice as likely to suffer heart attacks, stroke or death from cardiovascular causes, according to a recent study published in *Circulation*. The increased risk was independent of such traditional risk factors as high cholesterol, smoking and high blood pressure. “Our results reveal that erectile dysfunction is, in and of itself, a potent predictor of cardiovascular risk,” said the study’s lead author, Dr. Michael Blaha.

Dr. Blaha, director of clinical research at Johns Hopkins Ciccarone Center for the Prevention of Heart Disease, advised men with ED to undergo a comprehensive cardiovascular screening. What’s the link between problems in the bedroom and increased heart attack and stroke risk? Here’s a look at the latest discoveries about ED — and the best ways for men who have it to protect their heart and brain health.

### HOW COMMON IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION?

Defined as the inability to achieve or maintain an erection firm enough for sex, ED affects up to 57 percent of men in North America, [according to a 2019 study published in \*BJUI International\*](#).

After analyzing studies from all over the world, the researchers reported that overall, men with symptoms of impotence were twice as likely to suffer cardiovascular events as those without ED, while severe ED nearly quadrupled risk.

In the U.S., about 620,000 new cases of ED are reported each year — and the annual cost of treatment has been estimated at \$330 million. Other [studies](#) report that like heart disease, ED becomes more common as men age. About 40 percent of men have erection problems at age 40 and nearly 70 percent at age 70. However, ED is not inevitable as men get older; this condition is both preventable and highly treatable.

### IS ED A SYMPTOM OF HEART DISEASE?

Although there are a variety of conditions that can interfere with a man’s sexual performance — including stress, sleep disorders, diabetes, alcohol consumption, smoking, anxiety, depression and the use of certain medications — cardiovascular disease (CVD) is one of the most common culprits, new studies suggest. In September, [an analysis pooling the results of studies of more than 150,000 men](#) found that those with ED were 59

percent more likely to have CVD, 34 percent more likely to suffer a stroke and 33 percent more likely to die prematurely.

Commenting on the study, Harvard-affiliated cardiologist Dr. Ron Blankenstein [told CNN](#), “In many cases, [ED] might be the first warning sign of underlying cardiovascular disease.” He compares the penile artery to the proverbial “canary in the coal mine.” This artery, which delivers oxygenated blood to the penis, has a relatively small diameter, he explains: “It’s the smaller blood vessels which show the first signs of disease.” Other research shows that blood-vessel diseases, such as atherosclerosis (plaque buildup in the arteries,) are the underlying cause of about 70 percent of ED cases.

To find out if arterial disease is the root cause of your ED, we recommend a comprehensive cardiovascular evaluation with the BaleDoneen Method, practiced by hundreds of medical and dental providers around the world. This

Both delicious and nutritious, pumpkin is rich in disease-fighting antioxidants, but low in calories. It contains potassium, vitamin C and fiber, all of which have been linked to improved cardiovascular health. Potassium, in particular, has been shown to help reduce blood pressure and stroke risk. Oats are also high in fiber, which helps lower cholesterol and blood sugar and could even add years to your life. Ready in just 10 minutes — and then refrigerated overnight — this super-easy recipe also contains nuts, a staple of the heart-healthy Mediterranean diet, and a feast of flavors that make it perfect for Thanksgiving or any family celebration.

## INGREDIENTS

1 cup old-fashioned rolled oats  
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg  
 ½ teaspoon ground cloves or allspice  
 1 cup almond milk  
 1 cup pumpkin puree  
 2 tablespoons cashew or almond butter

## TOPPINGS (OPTIONAL)

3 tablespoons shredded coconut, toasted  
 3 tablespoons chopped pecans, toasted  
 3 tablespoons dried fruit (cranberries, raisins, prunes, dates, etc.)



## PREPARATION

Place all ingredients except the toppings in a mixing bowl. Mix until the consistency is creamy (similar to pumpkin pie filling). Transfer mixture to a nonstick 9-inch pie pan, smooth with a spatula, then cover tightly and refrigerate overnight to set. In the morning, toast coconut and pecans in a dry pan for a few minutes over low-medium heat, until fragrant. Stir frequently to avoid burning. Remove from heat and add dried fruit. Sprinkle topping over the pie and enjoy!

*Adapted from [onegreenplanet.com](http://onegreenplanet.com) and [foodnetwork.com](http://foodnetwork.com).*

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

precision medicine, [arteriology-based approach](#) is designed to protect and enhance the health of the more than 60,000 miles of blood vessels in your body, including those that supply the heart, brain and sex organs.

### IS ED PREVENTABLE?

The key message from the latest research is that erectile dysfunction is preventable through risk-factor modification. The BaleDoneen Method uses a team approach in which medical and dental providers work together to help patients avoid CVD and its many devastating complications, including heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, heart failure, chronic kidney disease and ED.

Many of the same conditions that cause arterial disease also increase your risk for ED, including smoking, high cholesterol, obstructive sleep apnea, low vitamin D and obesity. Another culprit is periodontal (gum) disease. A recent meta-analysis of studies of more than 500,000 people found that men with this chronic oral infection were at increased risk for ED. The good news, however, is that treating gum disease improved the quality of the men's erections.

Optimizing your oral wellness can also help you avoid a heart attack or stroke — and protects against dementia. As we recently reported, [getting dental care at least twice a year can actually be lifesaving!](#)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

# A 6-STEP PLAN THAT CAN SAVE LIVES, HEARTS AND BRAINS

Our precision-medicine approach to heart attack and stroke prevention has six components:

## EDUCATION



Knowledge is power! Our patients learn how heart attacks and strokes actually happen. A common misconception is that arterial disease is a plumbing problem, like grease clogging a kitchen sink, causing an artery to become so obstructed that flow of blood stops, resulting in a heart attack or stroke. However, studies show that these events occur when plaque inside the artery becomes inflamed and ruptures explosively, leading to the formation of a clot that blocks the flow of blood to the heart or brain. Most heart attacks occur in arteries that are minimally blocked by plaque, with the clot creating the rest of the obstruction.

## DISEASE



Early detection and treatment of arterial plaque is a key element of our evidence-based approach to prevention. We use advanced laboratory and imaging tests to directly check each patient for hidden signs of CVD, including [a painless 15-minute ultrasound exam](#) called carotid intima-media thickness (cIMT). A recent study of more than 10,000 people found that adding cIMT and the presence of plaque to traditional risk factors dramatically boosted the accuracy of 10-year predictions of heart attack and stroke risk. This FDA-approved imaging test can detect plaque at an early, highly treatable stage in people who look and feel healthy, such as our patient Wayne Williams. Although Williams, then 48, had normal blood pressure and cholesterol, a CIMT test detected plaque. Without treatment, he would have had an 83 percent chance of having a heart attack or stroke by the time he was 58. "I learned then that [CVD] is a silent killer," he [told Fox News](#). Today, after four years of personalized treatment with our method that included medications, lifestyle changes and supplements, the plaque in his arteries is completely stabilized, enabling him to live well without fear of a heart attack or stroke.

## FIRE IN THE ARTERIES



Chronic systemic inflammation, which we call "fire," has been shown to be both a cause and an [important treatment target for heart attack and stroke prevention](#). We use a "fire panel" of inexpensive blood and urine tests to check inflammatory markers. In 2017, results of the CANTOS trial published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that anti-inflammatory therapies reduce risk for heart attack, stroke, other cardiovascular events and cancer by up to 50 percent. We also recommend [natural ways to "fire-proof" your arteries](#).

## ROOT CAUSES



To put out fire inside the arteries, it's essential to find out what's causing it. For someone like Sen. Sanders, identifying the root cause is essential to prevent another heart attack. One possible culprit is his history of gout, since a 2018 study linked this inflammatory form of arthritis, which affects nearly six million American men and two million women, to increased risk for heart attacks, strokes and death from cardiovascular causes. An earlier study found that [men with gout are 26 percent more likely to have heart attacks](#) than those without it, even when other cardiovascular risks are taken into account. Our method checks for a wide range of root causes, including insulin resistance ([the hidden cause of about 70% of heart attacks](#)), [metabolic syndrome](#), high blood pressure ([the leading risk factor for stroke](#)), [sleep disorders](#) and [a dangerous cholesterol most doctors don't check](#), even though it has been proven to actually cause heart attacks! One of our recent studies has been described as "landmark," because it was [the first to identify oral bacteria from gum disease as a contributing cause of CVD](#).

## OPTIMAL GOALS



Just as a top-quality construction company may exceed the building code to make homes and offices even stronger and safer from fires, earthquakes and other catastrophes, in some cases, the BaleDoneen Method sets higher standards for treatment and prevention than those set by standard medical care. Work with your health-care provider to set optimal, individualized goals to modify each of your risk factors. This approach, rather than one-size-fits-all goals set by the standard of care and based on average results from large studies, leads to superior outcomes and more effective heart attack and stroke prevention.

## GENETICS



Basing care on each person's unique genetic makeup is the ultimate in precision medicine. The BaleDoneen Method has used genetic testing for more than a decade both to identify patients with inherited risk for heart attacks and strokes and to guide the best personalized treatments of those risks, including [a diet based on your DNA](#). In a 2018 study, we have also identified [an easy, inexpensive way to lower heart attack risk for people who have type 2 diabetes](#), based on a one-time genetic test. Another recent study revealed that if people at genetic risk for CVD stay physically fit, their risk drops by about 50%, highlighting the amazing power of an optimal lifestyle to keep your heart healthy, no matter what is written in your DNA.