

## Today Is World Heart Day

Obesity, leading risk factor in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Twenty years ago, the statistics for deaths resulting from cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Latin America and the Caribbean stood at 26 per cent. By 2020, the number of deaths from CVD is expected to triple. This is partially due to longer life expectancy, so it is important for persons to know their risk factors. This is the view of Dr Roger Uzcategui, manager, medical services, Merck Sharp & Dohme, Venezuela. Uzcategui was one of the presenters at the Sixth Annual Workshop on Health in Latin America and the Caribbean, held for journalists at the Institute of the Americas in La Jolla, California, from September 22-25. 100 countries Today is being observed as World Heart Day by more than 100 countries. The aim is to approach CVD from a preventive standpoint by making lifestyle changes, reducing risk factors and changing outlook. Uzcategui told journalists attending the workshop that the risk factors for heart disease that cannot be changed are age, sex and family history. Those that can be changed are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, overweight or obesity, smoking and a sedentary lifestyle. The more risk factors a person has, the greater their risk for heart disease. In men over age 45, the risk for CVD is greater; in women it increases over 55, particularly for menopausal women who no longer produce oestrogen. If your father, brother or son died of heart disease before age 55 and your mother, sister or daughter died of the disease before age 65, your risk is greater. Furthermore, nearly 70 per cent of diabetics die of CVD. In Latin America, the leading risk factor for the disease is abdominal obesity (48.5 per cent), placing it at the top of the list of risks. (Abdominal obesity is when there is increased waist size compared to hips.) This is followed closely by smoking, with the latest figures showing 48.1 per cent of the Latin American population at risk for myocardial infarction. Uzcategui said smoking continues to be a huge risk factor that cannot be overlooked, but he also revealed that in Latin America and the Caribbean, data show that 60 per cent of the overall population leads a sedentary lifestyle. "This is more so in persons over 60 years old who spend a lot of time in front of their television sets. Simply put, if you don't move, you get fat," he said. High cholesterol Another leading risk factor in the region is LDL cholesterol and if this is reduced, the risk for life-threatening heart disease is also reduced. Merck Sharp & Dohme has, for over 50 years, produced medications that are important in lowering cholesterol. Uzcategui said the drug company would continue to carry out research to develop and improve treatments for the disease. Source: Jamaica Gleaner