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The Added Benefits of Flu Shots – Healthy Hearts



Just a few months ago, we wrote about the effectiveness of flu vaccines. The annual push for the influenza vaccine protects millions of Americans each year from the influenza virus, known for harsh cold symptoms that can progress to hospitalization and sometimes even death. While we know flu shots are the best form of protection from the virus, medical research has also shown that the vaccine guards against additional medical illnesses particularly for those with chronic health conditions.

Recently, a study was published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* indicating that flu vaccines actually decrease risk for cardiovascular disease in those with Type 2 diabetes. As it turns out, vaccinating against the flu can lower risk for stroke by 30% and heart failure by 22%. The study also revealed that flu vaccines for this same group reduced overall deaths by nearly 25%.

The benefits of flu vaccines extend beyond diabetics. Flu shots reduce heart risks for anyone with previous or current heart conditions. Harvard Health reported on a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, which found that the influenza vaccine actually decreased all risks of major cardiac events by 36%.

It seems simple, but the cardiovascular benefits of flu vaccines come from warding off the flu itself. A case of the flu can stress the heart, which causes plaque buildup in blood vessels, and lowers blood oxygen levels. These conditions are precursors of heart attack, heart failure, stroke and other cardiac events.

Despite the potential benefits of the flu vaccine, both in protecting against the flu and other illnesses, the vaccine is under-adopted among both the chronically ill and healthy alike. The CDC recommends

that everyone older than six months get the influenza vaccine yearly, but still less than half of Americans get a flu shot each year.

So, why don't more people get vaccinated? An NPR Health and Truven Health Analytics survey found that nearly half of people surveyed cited the lack of need as their top reason for neglecting the flu vaccination. Other top reasons included fear of side effects and perceived ineffectiveness. Many of these notions stem from misinformation surrounding unproven, negative effects of vaccinations. It's up to health professionals, clinics and pharmacies to properly educate people about vaccine safety.

We encourage all medical professionals advocating for the flu shot. Recommendations from health professionals are the most important factor in influencing a patient's decision—something to keep in mind while planning for the next flu season this fall.. By communicating the benefits, we can help patients avoid the harsh symptoms and subsequent conditions.

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