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This book is dedicated to our patients,  
students, and colleagues,  
with gratitude for all that they have taught us.

# FOREWORD

During the germination of this book, a fellow Yale faculty member posed a most provocative question “Why should we devote so much of our time and effort to do this book at this time?” Why indeed? The question forced us to stop for a moment, to focus on our objectives, and to analyze just why we were so convinced that there really was a need for this particular book.

First, there’s the pervasive public preoccupation with the subject. Go to a cocktail party and the conversation invariably turns to cholesterol or exercise. Dinner party hostesses proudly introduce dishes by announcing: “This is absolutely free of animal fat and we’ve cut the calories in half!” Four-star restaurants and company cafeterias alike offer “heart healthy” selections. And it seems that every other item in the supermarket is labeled either “lite” or cholesterol-free.

Why this sudden emphasis on cardiovascular health? For the answer, we need only to look at mortality statistics of recent decades. In the 1950s, cardiovascular diseases claimed about one million American lives each year. In the 1960s, the cardiovascular death rate began a precipitous decline. By 1990, the death rate from heart attacks was about half of what it was in 1950, with an even more dramatic reduction in stroke mortality.

Many factors have contributed to these tremendous gains, especially the advances in medical technology. Of all the medical disciplines affected by the technological revolution, cardiovascular medicine has reaped the most dramatic benefits. Today, we routinely treat many conditions that were once invariably fatal; many others can be prevented, either by medical intervention or by life-style changes. In short, we have advanced from a state in which there was little that either physician or patient could do to challenge fate to one in which we all can be active

participants in the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular diseases.

In order to fully benefit from modern cardiovascular medicine, however, each individual needs a basic level of knowledge and understanding. What steps can I take to prevent or delay heart disease? When is it appropriate to seek medical help? And what should I expect? Simply lacking such basic information can add to the worry and anxiety generated by illness. Indeed, the stress of going to a doctor or entering a hospital without knowing what to expect can exacerbate the underlying problem.

Unfortunately, the public’s need for basic knowledge in cardiovascular medicine has not been matched by reliable sources of comprehensive and understandable information. Thus, this book was conceived to fill this information gap. In clear, simple language, this book covers the entire spectrum of cardiovascular disease. It begins with the basics by describing the heart and circulation, and providing an overview of what can go wrong. The next section tells how you can reduce your risk of a heart attack by eliminating or modifying detrimental life-style factors. This is followed by a discussion of symptoms and diagnosis, which serves as an introduction to an encyclopedia of common heart disorders and more detailed chapters on categories of cardiovascular diseases.

In the section on special situations, you will find chapters on heart disease in women, children, and the elderly, as well as a discussion of racial and ethnic factors. Five chapters are devoted to the major modalities of treatment: drugs, angioplasty and interventional cardiology, surgery, pacemakers, and emergency treatments. The chapter on cardiac rehabilitation outlines how to resume an active, productive life following a heart attack or heart surgery. Finally, the chapter on the patient as a consumer of

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fers practical guidelines on dealing with today's health-care system.

A concluding word of caution: This book should not be used to alter a regimen prescribed by your physician or to devise your own treatment program

—this should be entrusted only to a physician who knows your medical history. Instead, the information in this book is intended to improve your role as an informed partner in maintaining or achieving cardiovascular health.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THE EDITORS