

# DISARMING A HEARTLESS KILLER

## A Day In the Life of He Who Must Not Be Named

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2 PM Room A



By Melissa C. Navia

**T**ime is everything in the ER. Precious seconds once taken for granted can mean the difference between life and death. Often cold, always stressful, it is the last place anyone wants to be taken, but the first place to run to when an emergency hits. The urgency is palpable: A gurney is rushed down the hallway. On it lies a 42-year-old man, terrified and helpless. He has just experienced a massive heart attack. Doctors in white coats scramble to catch up and surround him. Thoughts of his wife and children cloud his head. The gurney slows to a halt, and he looks up at the doctor now standing next to him. "Am I going to die?" he asks with pleading eyes. The doctor knows he doesn't have an answer. He sees this same scene play out, as if scripted, every day. Another heart attack, another case of untreated symptoms, another person caught completely off guard. He looks back at the patient and says, "I'll do my best." But he knows that anything he does now cannot compare to what the man could have done on his own years before.

"There are too many things in life you can't control," says Dr. David Kavesteen, board certified in cardiovascular diseases, nuclear cardiology, and internal medicine, "but there's no reason to die from something that you can control, like your heart." The leading cause of death in the United States, heart disease poses the most insidious threat to our health on a regular basis, yet ironically, is extraordinarily treatable and even preventable. "People tend not to think about the heart until it's too late," Dr. Kavesteen continues. "They don't know the statistics, they don't know what to look for, and they're afraid that if they do find something, there is nothing we can do about it." The man in the story above had been a diabetic and a smoker. Dr. Kavesteen was the surgeon who opened up a severely clogged artery and saved his life. But the scenario could have gone either way, he reminds us. A heart attack renders both patient and doctor relatively and frustratingly merciless to forces that were set in motion long ago, unchecked, undiagnosed.

We know that heart disease is deadly. We know that its symptoms are often ignored. And we know that when it comes to prevention and treatment, the majority of us really don't, well, know. "There is so much you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease," insists Dr. Kavesteen, "but first you have to equip yourself with the facts." Let's start with risk factors: hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, and genetics, to name a few. All of these contribute to heart disease, whatever form it takes, including atherosclerosis, coronary artery disease, peripheral vascular disease, cardiac arrhythmias, and cardiomyopathy. Many of these can also be asymptomatic for years, making the need to understand and modify risk factors that much more important. But what if there are symptoms? "The signs of heart disease are often disregarded or attributed to something less severe," says Dr.

Kavesteen. These include shortness of breath, palpitations, weakness, fatigue, dizziness, nausea, chest discomfort, and heartburn. "Even if it turns out that there is nothing wrong," he reminds us, "remember that treatment is much easier and more cost-effective before a heart attack." In other words, it never hurts to check.

And if there is something amiss, that's where the field of cardiology gets to work. "Technology is changing the way we treat and understand the heart," says Dr. Kavesteen. He runs down a cursory list: tiny defibrillators that monitor the heart, high-tech springs that open up clogged arteries, pacemakers that regulate every nuance, and the ability to examine microscopic changes to determine the risk of sudden cardiovascular death. With tools like these, heart disease becomes a significantly less formidable foe.

Dr. Kavesteen will speak at the upcoming NAVEL Expo about how to prevent heart disease, from what you do and the food you eat to the treatments and programs available. "The heart is the only organ that your body needs to live," he cleverly points out, "and it's easy to keep it healthy." He will also highlight the differences between men and women when it comes to heart disease. For women, who still suffer from public misconceptions and often go undiagnosed, age is one of the most serious risk factors. After menopause, explains Dr. Kavesteen, the threat of heart disease is exponentially higher. His lecture will touch on the reasons why and what can be done about it.

"Eat well and exercise. Live life today. Don't wait for tomorrow," Dr. Kavesteen urges, offering a fitting piece of advice for taking care of the heart, a fundamental part of us. Its steady beating is the universally understood sound of life; its artistic depiction is synonymous with love. So give your heart the utmost attention. Take care of it today, and it will, in more ways than you know, take care of you tomorrow and long after.

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**Dr. David Kavesteen** received his Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry from SUNY Stony Brook with a magna cum laude and distinction in research award. He pursued his passion for medicine at Brooklyn's SUNY Health Science Center, completed his Internal Medicine training at the prestigious New York University Medical Center, and continued further education by specializing in Cardiovascular Diseases and Nuclear Cardiology at Maimonides Medical Center. Dr. Kavesteen is also the founder of Natural Beauty Derma Spa, a new generation of medspa, dedicated to holistic wellness, skin rejuvenation, and stress reduction. For more information about his practice, please visit either [www.HeartandHealth.com](http://www.HeartandHealth.com) or [www.KavesteenMD.com](http://www.KavesteenMD.com).