

Integrative Cardiology

Whole-person patient care improves outcomes.



Dr. Aseem Desai

At Providence Mission Hospital, we care about our patients as whole beings in body, mind and spirit. Physicians like Aseem Desai, MD, a cardiac electrophysiologist, have seen that this philosophy truly enhances the health and well-being of our patients. Dr. Desai specializes in heart rhythm disorders such as atrial fibrillation (afib), and he's one of many health care providers at Providence Mission to

incorporate integrative medicine, specifically integrative cardiology, to optimize a person's health and well-being.

"Integrative cardiology means looking at heart health systematically and taking into account other aspects of physical health, including psychosocial and environmental factors," says Dr. Desai. "It's meant to complement—not be a substitute for—conventional cardiology treatment such as drug therapy and surgery."

For example, he says, sometimes part of good cardiac care involves helping patients find appropriate, beneficial physical activities.

"We've prescribed yoga to patients, because there's pretty good data suggesting it helps with recovery from heart attack and heart surgery," says Dr. Desai. "Numerous studies have also shown that meditation and mindfulness is important in overall health, particularly in lowering blood pressure and heart rate."

He also uses HeartMath technology in his practice, which teaches patients how to use breathing techniques in combination with monitoring their heart rate variability, a well-validated measure of psychological and physical stress. "Patients can actually see an improvement in their response to life stress and an improvement in cardiovascular health when incorporating these mind-body practices," he says. Emotional health is also important. "In some cases, we've recommended cognitive behavioral therapy to help people manage

stress related to heart disease or recovery from surgery."

Diet and nutrition also play a role in integrative cardiology. "Food is medicine," says Dr. Desai. "Obviously there are different ways of approaching diet. There's the conventional DASH diet for cardiovascular health. There's the Mediterranean diet for weight loss. And the vegan diet has been shown in some studies to reverse arteriosclerosis, which is typically the cause of a heart attack."

Dr. Desai has adopted many of these integrative approaches to cardiac medicine. "A lot of studies suggest that you have to treat all the risk factors for afib to have a good outcome," he says. "However, some of my afib patients have seen tremendous improvement by losing 20 pounds; they were able to stop medication. The benefits of approaching the body from an integrative health standpoint are significant."

Providence Mission is affiliated with a multispecialty outpatient practice, the Mission Heritage Medical Group. A part of the group, Dr. Desai has referred many patients for nutritional counseling, diabetes management and sleep medicine. "We have a 12-week, medically supervised weight loss and nutrition program called Self-achieved Lifestyle Improvement and Management (SLIM)," he says. "We also have the Wellness Corner, which offers a holistic approach to health." The Wellness Corner complements traditional medical care by offering patients naturopathic as well as traditional Chinese medicine to achieve optimal vitality.

According to Dr. Desai, integrative cardiology offers benefits to all cardiology patients because it includes so many different disciplines. "Traditional cardiology has saved many cardiac patients," he says. "And integrative cardiology is just another tool in the toolbox." ●

To contact the heart rhythm specialists of Mission Heritage Medical Group—Dr. Jay Tiongson, Dr. Lynne Hung and Dr. Aseem Desai—call 949-347-2822.