

# HEALTHY HEART NEWS

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St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital's Cardiovascular Institute is committed to you and our community. We pride ourselves on being an engaged partner with the many constituencies that we serve. As part of our commitment to meeting your heart health needs, we have developed this quarterly newsletter filled with information that can improve the quality of, and in some cases, help save your life. If there are topics that you would like to see covered in future editions, please e-mail Beverly Keefer, Director of Cardiovascular Services, Cardiac Cath and Interventional Radiology at [bkeefer@slchospital.org](mailto:bkeefer@slchospital.org).

## FEBRUARY IS AMERICAN HEART MONTH

February is more than just a month to celebrate Valentine's Day; it's also the time to think about the health of our hearts. February has been designated as American Heart Month to help spread the news and make people aware of their risks and the facts regarding heart disease.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Every year one in four deaths are caused by heart disease. In the United States, someone has a heart attack every 34 seconds and every 60 seconds someone in the United States dies from a heart disease related event. About 720,000 people in the U.S. suffer heart attacks each year. Of these, 515,000 are a first heart attack and 205,000 happen to those that have already had a heart attack.

No other organ in the body has such a direct impact on every other organ as the heart. It is the heart's job to pump blood, oxygen and nutrients, to all the tissues of the body. If this pump fails, vital organs like the brain and kidneys suffer. If the heart stops working altogether, death occurs within minutes. Life itself is completely dependent on the efficient operation of the heart.

With the right information education and care, heart disease can be treated and prevented.

### MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN FEBRUARY

- Wear red on February 5th, the day nationally recognized to wear red and promote heart health.
- Educate yourself and Pay attention to your risk factors and know the symptoms.
- Be One in a MILLION! Launched in 2011 by the Department of Health and Human Services, Million Hearts is a national initiative that aims to prevent 1 million heart attack and strokes in the United States by 2017. Prevention starts with everyone. Protect yourself and your loved ones!

## WHAT IS CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE?

Heart disease is a broad term used for a wide variety of conditions of the heart and blood vessels and often is referred to as Coronary Artery Disease (CAD). Coronary Artery Disease is a condition in which plaque, which is made up of fat, cholesterol and calcium build up inside the coronary arteries that supply oxygen to the heart muscle. This can grow large enough to reduce or completely block the blood flow through the arteries. This plaque can rupture, causing a blood clot to form that may block the coronary arteries or break off and travel to somewhere else in the body. When the blockage takes place in a blood vessel in the heart – the result is a heart attack.

## KNOW YOUR RISK FACTORS

- Age, family history and gender are risk factors that cannot be changed. The risk for heart attack increases after age 45 for men and age 55 for women. If a parent or sibling developed heart disease before age 55, the risk for heart attack increases.
- Some factors for heart attack can be controlled, including smoking and high cholesterol. Smoking cessation tools are available through health care professionals or through community organizations.
- Inactivity can lead to obesity, which can then lead to high blood pressure. All three increase the risk for heart attack.
- Moderate exercise and good nutrition can help obesity, and reduce the risk of heart attack from diabetes and high cholesterol. Good nutrition consists of a well-balanced diet of fruit and vegetables, whole grains, fiber and lean proteins.
- Other lifestyle changes that can decrease the risk for heart attack include reducing alcohol intake to no more than one to two drinks per day and reducing stress.



## SYMPTOMS OF A HEART ATTACK

Knowing the signs and symptoms of a heart attack can save a life. Those who seek immediate treatment greatly increase their chances of survival. People who don't know they are experiencing a heart attack will often wait too long before seeking help. Half of the deaths from heart attacks occur because there was not enough time to get medical treatment.

*The following signs are common warning signs and serve as a warning that emergency medical help is needed.*

### CHEST PAIN

One of most common signs of a heart attack is chest discomfort. Feelings of pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the chest area can signal that the heart is not functioning properly. Chest pain does not always signal a heart problem. Similar symptoms are also associated with other conditions that include respiratory infections, acid reflux and pinched nerves, however, it is important to take action and seek medical attention to determine the cause for severe chest discomfort.

### UPPER BODY DISCOMFORT

The pain and discomfort associated with have a heart attack is not always limited to the chest area. Back pain and jaw pain are often associated with heart attacks, especially in women. Shooting pains that run down either arm are also signs that there is a problem with blood flow to the heart.

### SHORTNESS OF BREATH

Shortness of breath indicates that the body is not getting enough oxygen. During a heart attack, this symptom indicates that blood flow to the heart has been compromised. When the heart cannot pump blood, oxygen cannot get to the cells in the body. This symptom is usually accompanied by other signs such as fatigue and dizziness.

### COLD SWEAT AND ANXIETY

Many people have anxiety problems that are unrelated to heart issues, but when cold sweats occur along with other symptoms of a heart attack, it is important to seek medical treatment.

### NAUSEA

While nausea is associated with a variety of health concerns, it is especially associated with heart attacks when accompanied by other symptoms. While most people don't think about nausea in terms of cardiac issues, it can be a sign that a person is having a heart attack.

### INDIGESTION

Because the heart is attempting to direct blood flow to the most vital organs, less blood is going to the stomach. This leads to indigestion because the body is not attempting to digest food properly. Indigestion that occurs with other symptoms can be a sign of a heart attack.

### FATIGUE

When the body is oxygen deprived, fatigue happens quickly. During a heart attack, blood flow to the heart is restricted so feelings of extreme tiredness can be a symptom. To make up for the lack of oxygen, the heart will pull blood from non-vital organs. This causes the body to feel suddenly fatigued.

### DIZZINESS

Dizziness is sometimes the first sign of a heart attack. This occurs because blood flow to the brain has been restricted. At the first sign of lightheadedness, it is important to get to a seated position to prevent falls. There can be other causes for dizziness, so many people often overlook this important warning sign.

*If you think that you or someone you are with is having a heart attack —  
CALL 911 immediately!*

*Every minute you delay can result in damage to your heart.*