



Lady of America Newsletter – February 2010 – The Love Issue

Fitness: The Heart of a Woman

February is *American Heart Month* and on Feb. 5 you are encouraged to participate in the annual *Wear Red Day*, a national observance that encourages Americans to wear red to raise heart disease awareness. According to the American Heart Association, the best time to get heart healthy is *now*, no matter what your age.

Though deaths have declined, heart disease continues to be the #1 killer among women. Statistics show that one woman dies every minute from cardiovascular disease — 450,000 deaths per year. What is interesting is that these women are dying of heart disease at much later ages than in the past years. However, according to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI), data on increasing rates of overweight and obesity — important risk factors for heart disease — in younger women indicate there could be a greater prevalence of heart disease in later years.



“Women must get serious about heart disease and take control of their heart health, starting at an early age,” said Dr. Elizabeth G. Nabel, director of NHLBI. “Younger women need to take steps now, like eating a healthy diet and being physically active, to help prevent heart disease later.”

A new survey conducted in January 2009 shows that 65 % of women are aware that heart disease is their #1 killer, a slight increase from 2008. However, even with increased awareness, many women are not taking this message seriously or personally. “Understanding your personal risk of heart disease really matters. Having just one risk factor for heart disease — like high blood pressure or being overweight — doubles your chance of developing heart disease. And the alarming fact is that more than 80% of mid-life women have one or more of the risk factors,” said Dr. Nabel.

Despite the alarming stats, heart disease is largely preventable. Women have tremendous power to reduce their risk of heart disease and lead a longer, healthier life. Doctors confer that by eating right, being physically active, not smoking and keeping a healthy weight, Americans can lower their risk by as much as 82%.

As women age and enter post-menopause, the risk factor increases. “Estrogen protects the heart,” said Dr. Anne M. Kudelka, a cardiologist with North Shore Cardiology Consultants in Chicago. To help maintain the health of your heart, or to reverse the risks of coronary artery disease, you must follow a healthy diet *and* exercise.

“The bottom line for prevention is living a heart-healthy lifestyle. Of course, you must also manage other risk factors, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stress and smoking,” Kudelka said.

Research continues to show that being physically *inactive* can contribute to developing coronary artery disease. Think of exercise as the gift that keeps on giving because regular, moderate exercise helps control blood pressure and cholesterol and prevents diabetes.

The American Heart Association, in collaboration with the American College of Sports Medicine, recommends a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, three to four days a week and a vigorous-intensity workout for a minimum of 20 minutes three days a week.

What type of exercise is best? Lady of America's Official Fitness Trainer Natalie Brabner recommends any aerobic activity — spinning, elliptical, aerobics, dance classes, swimming, jogging and walking, for example. "Find what you enjoy doing and strive for 75 to 85% of your maximum heart rate," said Brabner.

If you've had a coronary event — be it a stroke or heart attack — talk with your doctor about setting up a specific exercise regimen and heart rate goals.

"Be reasonable and make common-sense choices. My mantra is 'everything in moderation.' Make small changes, set realistic goals and have realistic expectations," Kudleka offered.

Do you know the signs of a stroke or heart attack? Most people don't. The American Heart Association has listed on their website the warning signs. Take a quick look at the symptoms listed here so you can familiarize yourself with any sudden change in your body.

Signs a Heart Attack May be Happening:

- ❖ Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- ❖ Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- ❖ Shortness of breath. This feeling may occur with or without chest discomfort.
- ❖ Other signs of discomfort. These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness.
- ❖ As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting and back or jaw pain.

If you or someone you are with has chest discomfort, especially with one or more of the other signs, don't wait longer than 5 minutes before calling 911 for help.

Stroke Warning Signs

Stroke is a medical emergency. Learn to recognize a stroke, because any delay in treatment can lead to brain damage.

Warning signs may include:

- ❖ Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body
- ❖ Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- ❖ Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- ❖ Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- ❖ Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

Not all these warning signs occur in every stroke. If you or someone you are with has one or more stroke symptoms that last more than a few minutes, immediately call 911.

Risk Factors You Can Control or Treat

It's important to know your numbers: These risk factors can be controlled or treated with help from your doctor and by changing your lifestyle.

*Cholesterol

*Blood Pressure

*Smoking

*Obesity

*Physical Activity

*Diabetes

*Stress

*Smoking

*Alcohol & Drugs

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