

Time is Ticking

Time may be ticking, but it's still February, and that means it's still "American Heart Month." With only 28 days to bring awareness to our nation's No. 1 killer, February hardly seems enough time to educate people about the importance of diet and exercise, of managing high blood pressure, or the dangers of smoking. It doesn't seem to leave enough time to heed the warnings that cardiovascular disease — including heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure — is responsible for one out of every three deaths, the No. 1 killer of American women and men, and a leading cause of serious illness and disability.

It may be just one month, but it's a start. American Heart Month helps us focus on those factors we can change, just one day at a time, to live better and healthier in the months ahead. It brings awareness and attention to the importance of a healthy heart, of watching our cholesterol and blood pressure numbers, of a walk around Harmon Field, or adding more fish to our weekly menus.

Certainly there are those risk factors we cannot change, but there are so many steps we can take to help and protect our heart. Here are just a few:

Stop smoking. If you don't smoke, great! Don't start! (St. Luke's Hospital offers a Nicotine Support Group every Thursday at 7 p.m. Call 699-9001 for more information.)

Eat a healthy diet. Maintaining a healthy weight can prevent so many other health problems including diabetes. (Foothills Health Network and St. Luke's Hospital are sponsoring a 25 session Diabetes Prevention Program that focuses on nutrition and exercise with a large dose of education and encouragement. Or take advantage of the Diabetes Support Group that is forming. Call 894-0824 for more information.)

Be sure to get regular exercise. Adults need at least 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (i.e., brisk walking) every week **and** muscle-strengthening on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms). Check out www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity for more information. And watch this column by Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) for future programs!

Maintain a healthy blood pressure. Check it often. High blood pressure alone is called "the Silent Killer."

Watch your cholesterol. Depending on your genes, you may need a prescription from your physician, but watching your diet to avoid saturated fat and contains little or no **trans** fat helps too!!

Know the signs and symptoms of a heart attack. 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. Other symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach, and shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort. Other signs may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness. If this happens, call 9-1-1!

Reduce stress!! Enough said. Take up yoga or running or any other healthy activity to replace stressors.

Check out the American Heart Association's website. Go to www.heart.org for tons of resources, checklists, health assessments and a new program to help monitor and encourage you to make good lifestyle choices. Healthy For Good is a revolutionary movement to inspire you to create lasting change in your health and your life, one small step at a time.

But hurry up. Time is ticking!!

A longtime member of Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly, Kathy Woodham is the Marketing/Public Relations Director for St. Luke's Hospital. Please follow her advice and take good care of your heart.