

Take Care, Take Heart. February Is American Heart Month

February is American Heart Month, the perfect time to be reminded to take care of your heart. "Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women," said Gerald Sotsky, M.D., chair of Cardiac Services, Valley Medical Group. "But there is good news," he said, "heart disease is largely preventable and controllable."

Although you can't control risk factors for heart disease such as age (45 years or older for men; 55 years or older for women) or family history of early heart disease (father or brother affected before age 45; mother or sister affected before age 55), there are risk factors you can control such as:

- High cholesterol
- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- Obesity/overweight
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes

Heart health can be easier to achieve than you might think. It doesn't require hours of grueling exercise or giving up all of your favorite foods. A few simple lifestyle changes can make all the difference. As a matter of fact, Americans can lower their risk of heart disease by more than 70 percent by simply leading a healthy lifestyle that addresses risks you can control.

Here are some tips to get you on your way:

- Exercise 30 to 60 minutes a day on most days of the week. This can be as simple as taking a daily walk.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Quit or don't start smoking.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and legumes, limiting highly refined carbohydrates and saturated fats.

It's equally important to be alert to

the signs and symptoms of a heart attack, which can include:

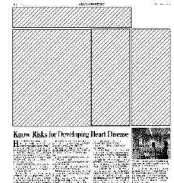
- Uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of your chest;
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach;
- Shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort;
- Nausea, lightheadedness, or breaking out in a cold sweat; and
- Chest pain or discomfort.

Symptoms of a heart attack in women can be less distinctive than they tend to be in men. "Both men and women can experience the typical chest pain, pressure or discomfort, but women are somewhat more likely than men to experience more subtle symptoms, such as shortness of breath, dizziness or lightheadedness, pressure or pain in the lower chest or upper abdomen, or extreme fatigue," said cardiologist Benita Burke, M.D., medical director of Valley Medical Group's Heart Care for Women medical practice.

Dr. Sotsky suggests that an evaluation by a cardiologist may be appropriate if:

- You are experiencing symptoms of heart disease (chest pain and/or palpitations, fatigue, breathlessness, generalized weakness, discomfort from the jaw down to the waist);
- You have a family history (mother, father, siblings) of coronary artery disease, aneurysm, and/or sudden death before age 50; and/or
- You have significant risk factors for heart disease (hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, overweight).

To learn more about Valley's cardiology services or to make an appointment with a Valley Medical Group cardiologist, visit www.ValleyMedicalGroup.com.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF [THE VALLEY HOSPITAL](#)

The Valley's Dr. Gerald Sotsky, chair of Cardiac Services, and Dr. Benita Burke, medical director of Heart Care for Women, urge men and women to know their risks for heart disease.