

## February is Healthy Heart Month

Remember the Wizard of Oz? The cowardly lion needed courage. The straw man needed a brain. The tin man needed a heart. And each of us needs all three to do battle with the leading killers in our society. Heart disease and stroke together take an enormous human toll.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading killer of both men and women in the United States. Heart attacks, strokes, and cardiac arrests all fall under this heading. Together, they account for more deaths than the next eight causes of death combined.



Our hearts and our brains are critical to our quality of life – and to life itself. When either of them is under attack, we must act quickly and with courage to limit the damage that is done. Most of us know just what to do when we see someone having a heart attack or suffering from cardiac arrest. Call 911! Immediate medical attention is needed and if the individual is not breathing or their heart is not beating, bystander cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) may be needed until help arrives.

Did you know that calling 911 immediately is just as important for someone having a stroke? Think of a stroke as a “brain attack”: parts of the brain are being deprived of oxygen. Immediate medical care can reverse or reduce the effects of many strokes. The window of time is very short, however. Medications may mean the difference between life and death.

So if you or a loved one has any sudden and dramatic symptoms that may indicate a heart attack or a stroke, don't hesitate. Call for help.

Symptoms of heart attack include a feeling of extreme pressure or pain in the chest, sometimes radiating down the arm or up to the jaw. Shortness of breath, excessive sweating, light-headedness, nausea, and vomiting may also occur. Back pain can be another sign. For reasons that we don't understand, many women and people with diabetes are less likely to have the classic symptoms of chest pressure and shortness of breath. They are more likely to have light-headedness, nausea, vomiting, and/or back pain. Any combination of these symptoms requires fast action.

The symptoms of stroke usually come on quickly, and include weakness on one side of the body, slurred speech, changes in vision, loss of balance or coordination, and/or confusion, trouble speaking, or trouble understanding. If you see these symptoms, don't wait: do get help!

Fortunately for us, we can reduce our risk for heart attack and stroke with changes in behavior. Weight loss, treatment for high blood pressure, getting exercise, lowering cholesterol, stopping smoking, and generally living a healthier life style lowers our risk for cardiovascular diseases. So just like the lion, the tin man, and the straw man, we need to follow the “yellow brick road” and keep moving forward to a healthier lifestyle.

Here are some helpful links to sources that discuss cardiovascular health and disease in greater detail.

<http://www.healthy-heart-guide.com/>

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/heart/health/program>

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1200000>

Here are some additional sites for healthy heart recipes:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/heart-healthy-recipes/RE00098>

<http://www.healthycookingrecipes.com/cookinghealthyarticles/heart-healthy-recipe.htm>

Here is some vital information on CPR:

<http://depts.washington.edu/learncpr/quickcpr.html>