

Love Your



*By Stacy Booth*

*According to the American Heart Association:*

*One in three Americans has some form of cardiovascular disease.  
1.2 million American adults had a first-time or recurrent heart attack in 2006.  
Coronary heart disease is the No. 1 killer of Americans.*

*It is something everyone should be concerned about.*

*Dr. Stacey Donlan, a primary care physician at Eastside Premier Medicine, says even if you are not currently in a category that places you at risk, you never know when your category might change. For that reason, following are some ways you can decrease your risk of developing heart disease.*

## Stop Smoking

Although the risks of smoking are well known, increased risks for cardiovascular disease might not get as much attention as increased cancer risk. Smoking cigarettes is one of the largest factors for heart disease that is changeable. Smoking can increase fatty buildup in arteries, lowers HDL (good cholesterol) levels, increase blood pressure, increase the tendency for blood to clot and decrease exercise tolerance. If a smoker also is overweight, has diabetes, takes oral contraceptives or has a family history of heart disease, the risks from smoking increase even more. Smokers are two to four times more likely to develop coronary heart disease than nonsmokers, but within minutes of quitting smoking, a person's risk for heart disease decreases, and in one year, a person's risk is cut in half.

## Start Exercising

Cardio will help exercise the heart, keeping it strong. It will also increase HDL levels. Exercise can also help lower body mass index, which is another indicator of heart-disease risk. Stacey recommends that you try to get 40 minutes of aerobic activity three to four times a week. And studies suggest it doesn't have to be a vigorous workout. In fact, researchers in Italy found that ballroom dancing was just as effective as cycling or using a treadmill for improving exercise ability. The study included 110 heart-failure patients. The benefit of ballroom dancing for some might also be that it is simply more fun than cycling, walking or running. And a fun exercise routine is more likely to last. Finding a physical activity you enjoy, and doing it, is incredibly important, as being physically inactive increases your risk of coronary heart disease as much as if you were a smoker or had high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

For those who want to start an exercise regimen or want to try something new, the Bellevue Club has myriad options available. Through the Fitness Department, members can work with personal trainers, take indoor cycling classes, participate in running or other cardio classes and more. The Recreation Department has a basketball league, open play

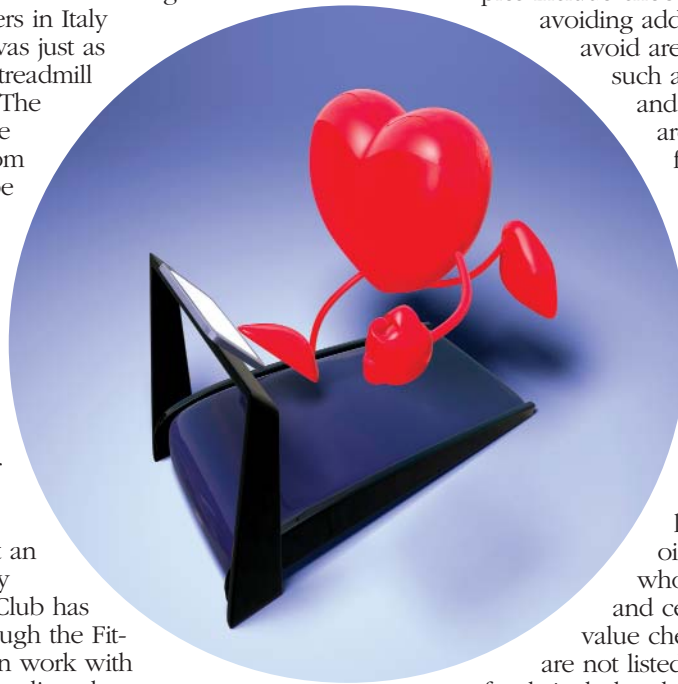
times for volleyball and pickleball, ballroom dancing classes and karate classes. The Tennis Department has camps, lessons and special group nights available for all ages. The Club also has a Masters Swimming program, and for the more casual swimmer, open swim times. There is also an indoor track above the gym, which is great for these cold, rainy months.

## Pay Attention to Nutrition

Eating a heart-healthy diet is a good idea not just for people with heart disease or the risk factors for heart disease, but also for everyone. A heart-healthy diet, according to Club Nutritionist Cherie Valley, includes eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, lowfat meats and whole grains. A good way to make sure you are eating properly is to eat colorful items. "The more color, the more vitamins and minerals," Cherie says. The best choices are foods that contain high amounts of vitamins C and E, beta-carotene and fiber. Examples include oranges, tomatoes, raw nuts, chicken, fish, carrots, squash, spinach and beans.

Trying to eat healthier foods and prepare foods in a healthier way may, at first, be difficult. Some basic principles include choosing low-salt items and avoiding added sugar. Other things to avoid are foods high in saturated fats such as fried foods, dairy and beef, and foods with trans fats, which are found in things containing fully or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. Saturated and trans fats raise low-density lipoprotein (LDL) levels, which is the bad cholesterol.

While grocery shopping, another important tip is to buy foods that have low glycemic values, which in general translates to "healthy" foods: lean meats like chicken and fish; light dairy products; good oils like canola and olive; and whole-wheat grains in pastas and cereals. Cherie has a glycemic value cheat sheet available, as these are not listed on food labels. Good go-to foods include whole-wheat pita bread, lowfat hummus, apples, carrots, lowfat bran muffins, peanut butter, oatmeal, yogurt, spinach, tomatoes, garlic and raw



nuts. Cherie also recommends the book “The Ultimate Healthy Eating Plan,” which is available at the Fitness Service Desk.

Even if your cooking and grocery shopping are healthy, you can't always eat at home. Cherie's tip for restaurants is to pay attention to portion sizes, and avoid eating too much bread before your meal. When your meal does arrive, eat the fruits and vegetables before the protein on the plate, and be sure to drink plenty of water throughout the meal.

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For anyone who wants more assistance learning about nutrition or wants help eating correctly for his or her body, appointments with a Club nutritionist may be made through the Fitness Service Desk in Studio 1 or by calling a client service representative at 688-3177. Additionally, brochures explaining the nutrition services available to members can be found at the Fitness Service Desk.

Cherie says it's important to keep in mind that everyone is an individual, and what works for a friend might not be the best choice for you.

## Control Risk Factors for Heart Disease

While some people have risk factors for heart disease that are not controllable—such as family history—everyone does have control over other risk factors. Blood pressure, cholesterol levels, BMI (body mass index) and diabetes are four big risk factors that, through diet and exercise, and medication in some cases, can be monitored and kept in check. Stacey says the first thing she will often suggest to patients with controllable risk factors are behavior changes to lower blood pressure or cholesterol, reduce BMI or control diabetes. Stacey says it can take three to six months for these behavioral changes to start reducing risk factors. There are cases—extremely high blood pressure or a family history of heart attacks around the age of a patient—when prescribed medication to control a particular risk factor will start immediately. For everyone, however, knowing baseline numbers for blood pressure and cholesterol, and having these monitored by your doctor is important.

## Relax!

With a family, a house, a career, traffic and more, every person has to deal with more than one stressor daily. Stacey suggests everyone try to lessen the stress in his or her life. That is one way to change behavior to help protect against heart disease. While a direct link

between stress and heart disease is not clear, what many doctors do think is that stress contributes to other risk factors, such as obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and smoking. Besides, learning to reduce stress will contribute to better overall health, not just better cardiovascular health.

Relaxation is a skill that can be learned, and there are as many ways to relax as there are people. While some might find strenuous exercise relaxing, others turn to yoga, Pilates or meditation. Reading, participating in a hobby or having lunch with friends are other ways to relax. The point is to find something you enjoy, and learn to release tension while participating in that activity.

The Club has many options available for members looking to relax. There are a number of yoga classes, a new stretching class and Pilates studio sessions available, but if exercise doesn't sound relaxing to you, try lunching with friends at Splash or Polaris, getting a massage, facial or manicure in the Spa or joining the bridge group.

## Beware of Risky Emotions

In addition to stress, depression, anxiety and toxic anger might put you at higher risk for heart disease. An article published in “Depression and Anxiety” says research from the past two decades shows people with depression are more at risk for developing heart disease. It has also been found that someone with heart disease who is also depressed has an increased risk of death after a heart attack compared to people who are not depressed. While it is not certain why these relationships



between heart disease and depression occur, it might be that depression, as well as anxiety disorders, affect heart rhythms, increases blood pressure and alters blood clotting. Depression and anxiety can also increase levels of insulin and cholesterol, two risk factors for heart disease.

Anxiety, in addition to the research findings above, has also been found to relate to incidence of sudden cardiac death in men. Also, a study involving women found women with phobic anxieties were at a higher risk for fatal heart disease than women with few or no anxieties. In many studies regarding heart disease and emotions, it is not clear if the strong emotions themselves increase risk for heart disease or if they increase the likelihood the person smokes, is overweight, or has other increased risk factors.

Toxic anger might also be dangerous. Toxic anger is usually more intense, longer lasting and more frequent than annoyance or frustration. One study found that in men, those with toxic anger were at more than twice the risk for death from cardiovascular disease than men with lower scores. Another study found that, in men, those who expressed their anger at least some of the time reduced their risk for both heart attacks and stroke.

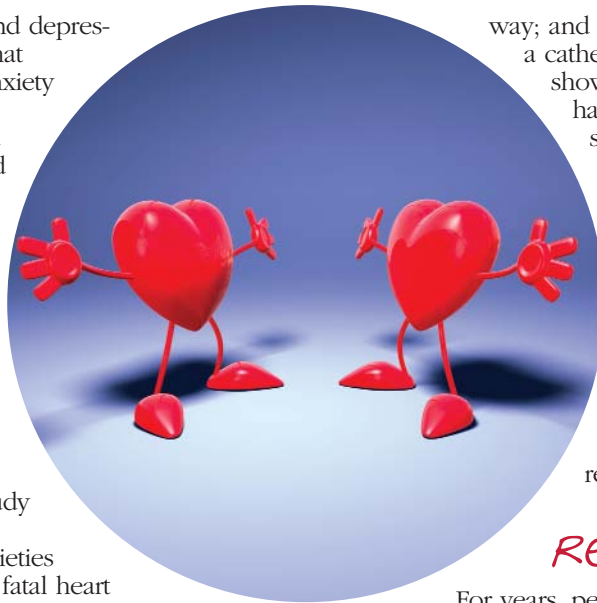
## Visit Your Doctor

Stacey says she has found people do not go to the doctor enough for checkups. Visiting the doctor for a yearly exam is one of the best tools for not only catching heart disease, but also any other problems that might occur. Stacey suggests annual checkups and heart-disease screenings after age 50, but if there is a family history of heart disease at a young age, screenings should start earlier.

Common screenings include taking a patient's blood pressure and checking cholesterol levels. Many people might also do a stress test (or treadmill test). The stress test, however, can only diagnose advanced heart disease. There are also more high-tech tests for heart disease, including the EBT screening, a quick, noninvasive test

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that determines the amount of calcium (which is closely linked to artery blockage) in arteries; an echocardiogram, or ultrasound of the heart; a CT scan, another way to diagnose calcium buildup in arteries in a noninvasive



way; and PET imaging and angiograms, which use a catheter to run dye into arteries that will then show blockage on X-rays. Each of these tests has advantages and disadvantages, with some exposing patients to radiation and others carrying risks of complications.

Any method of diagnosing heart disease should be discussed with your doctor.

No matter what tests you choose to participate or not to participate in, going to the doctor, knowing family history (especially if you are young) and discussing risk factors is important. Heart-disease progression can be slowed, and recent studies have shown evidence that buildup might even be reversible.

## Recognize Symptoms

For years, people knew a heart attack only by chest and left-arm pain. Then, it was thought that men and women had different symptoms when having heart attacks. But, says Stacey, research has now found that is a misstatement. Both men and women can have the typical symptoms: chest pain, shortness of breath, sweating and left-arm pain; as well as atypical symptoms: nausea, shoulder or right-arm pain, back pain or jaw pain. The symptoms a person experiences are related to where in the heart the problem is. For example, says Stacey, if the problem is at an interior wall, a person will probably experience nausea. And someone experiencing a second heart attack might not have the same symptoms they did during the first heart attack.

Because there are a variety of symptoms, some people might not realize they are experiencing a heart attack. Doctors stress, however, that if you think you might be having a heart attack, it's important to get to the hospital as soon as possible. Calling 911 is often the best way to get to the ER. When you arrive in an ambulance, you can almost immediately see a doctor and get help, which will save more of your heart muscle. If you or someone else drives you to the hospital, it can be hours before you are seen, which increases the likelihood that heart muscle will be damaged. Two hours is the ideal maximum for the amount of time from onset of symptoms to treatment.

Heart disease does not have to mean disability or death. Having open discussions with your doctor and controlling risk factors will go a long way toward keeping your heart healthy. For more information about keeping your heart healthy, visit the American Heart Association at [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org).

