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February is National Heart Month

February is National Heart Month. Cardiovascular disease is the nation's number 1 killer. Every minute an American dies of a coronary artery event. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women in the United States, killing more women than all forms of cancer combined. One in three women die of heart disease, while one in 31 die of breast cancer. Men tend to get heart disease earlier in life than women, but after menopause, women catch up.

Heart disease doesn't just happen. It is the result of years of non-symptomatic events like high cholesterol, smoking, obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure together with hereditary factors. Most people don't know they have heart disease until their first symptoms- a heart attack! Those arteries gradually clog up with plaque until they are closed up causing the pain associated with a heart attack. During a heart attack, the heart is almost always still beating but the blood supply to it is blocked. As a result, it doesn't get enough oxygen, which can injure the heart. When your heart suddenly stops beating, it's called "cardiac arrest."

Know the signs of a heart attack. Early medical attention can save your life. A heart attack can feel different for men and women. The most common sign of a heart attack is a crushing-like pain in the chest. Women more likely than men may experience shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, dizziness, pain in the jaw, shoulder or upper back area making it difficult to differentiate from muscle back pain or strain. But a heart attack won't get better. In fact, it will worsen. Seek medical care.

Know your risk. If you are over 50 and have a family history of heart events you can still alter your risk. Know your numbers. Keep your blood pressure and cholesterol under control. Taking your prescribed medications is very important to protect you from heart disease. Maintain your weight through healthy eating patterns and exercise.

Don't smoke. Smoking damages your heart. Most people worry about lung cancer and emphysema associated with smoking. Smoking related circulatory disease kills far more smokers than lung cancer. Heart disease is also often caused by smoking. Smoking 20 cigarettes daily increases the risk of heart attack 6 times in women and 3 times in men. The chemicals in tobacco damage the blood vessels leading to scarring of the arteries making plaque easier to lodge in the arteries. Smoking has also been shown to increase death from heart disease significantly.

Get at least 30 minutes of moderate activity (like gardening, walking, yoga, or a leisurely bike ride) at least 5 days a week. Or you can do at least 25 minutes of harder activity (like running, swimming, or basketball) 3 days a week. You can break it up into 10 or 15 minutes here and there, if that works better for you.

Resources used for this article: www.americanheart.org
, www.nhlbi.nih.gov, www.healthgrades.com , and www.webmd.com.

Local Resources: Your medical provider/clinic, local hospital, your health insurance company/benefits handbook, Wisconsin Quit Line, The 2017 Source, BadgerCare+ benefits handbook, and Washburn County Health Department.