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Mt. Pleasant Morning Sun Healthy Lifestyles Section

Learn to recognize heart attack warning signs

STANTON~ “Never in a million years would I have guessed that I was at-risk for a heart attack,” said Ruth, a 75-year-old from Lakeview. “I’m extremely healthy (or so I thought) and lead a very active lifestyle; I cross-country ski, go for long walks, ride my bike, and so much more. Then one day this past spring I had a heart attack. I still can’t believe it happened to me.”

Ruth was unaware she had heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States and a major cause of disability.

“Yes, there were subtle warning signs in the days leading up to my heart attack,” said Ruth, “but I just didn’t make the connection. Thank God I called for help when I did.”

Ruth now knows how important it is to recognize the early warning signs of a heart attack and act immediately by calling 9-1-1. Since almost half of the people who have a heart attack die, time is of the essence. “It’s so scary to think that if I’d waited another hour I might not be here today, she added.”

Signs of a heart attack may include:

- Chest discomfort (pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain) that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body, such as one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw, or stomach
- Shortness of breath, often accompanied with chest discomfort
- Other symptoms may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness

In Ruth’s case her decision to call 9-1-1 saved her life. She was rushed to the emergency room where she received life-saving care and later underwent several surgeries to insert stents (wire mesh tubes) into her blocked arteries to improve blood flow.

“Heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are the number one killers in Michigan,” said Dr. Robert Graham, Medical Director for the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD). “But we are not powerless when it comes to preventing a heart attack. We can help prevent, delay or minimize the effects of heart disease. The key is to control your risk factors.”

-more-

2~ Heart attack

Risk factors include:

- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Smoking
- Alcohol use
- Unhealthy weight
- Lack of regular physical activity
- Poor diet
- Unmanaged stress and anger

Knowing the signs and symptoms of heart attack, calling 9-1-1 right away, and getting to a hospital are crucial to the most positive outcomes after having a heart attack. For more information talk with your doctor or visit www.americanheart.org.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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