

World Heart Day Underscores Why Diet and Exercise Count

By Paul DeMiglio | September 26, 2013

This year's World Heart Day on Sunday, September 29 will focus on raising awareness around changes that individuals – especially women and children – can incorporate into their daily habits to reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Created in 2000 by the World Heart Federation (WHF) to highlight heart disease and stroke as the world's leading causes of death claiming 17.3 million lives each year, advocates will educate the public about prevention strategies through talks and screenings, walks and runs, concerts and sporting events.

It is expected that by 2030, 23 million people will die of CVD, more than the entire population of Australia. Together with its members, WHF reports that 80 percent of premature deaths from CVD could be reduced if individuals take the following actions:

- Reduce or discontinue use of tobacco
- Eat healthfully
- Engage in physical activity

CVD can affect people of all ages and population groups, including women and children, as illustrated in WHF's infographic that also shares practical tips on how to eat more healthfully and exercise more frequently. To teach children about healthy heart living, WHF also created a leaflet along with a character, "Superheart," that encourages:

- Playing outdoor games
- Cycling



- Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends increasing daily servings of mostly plant-based foods to help improve cardio health, acknowledging that “many studies have shown that vegetarians seem to have a lower risk of obesity, coronary heart disease (which causes heart attack), high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus and some forms of cancer.”

To support better coronary health outcomes, AHA created five goals for healthy eating that encourage individuals to:

- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Consume more whole grain foods.
- Use liquid vegetable oils such olive, canola, corn or safflower as your main kitchen fat.
- Eat more chicken, fish and beans than other meats.
- Read food labels to help you choose the healthiest option.

AHA also published an info sheet about the warning signs of a heart attack, which often starts slowly and usually goes unnoticed. This is especially true among women, whose symptoms can often mimic those of the flu. Additionally, it is common among women to put others first, especially their children, and so they usually do not recognize symptoms until it is too late. To address this public health challenge, AHA initiated the Go Red for Women campaign to empower women to know their risk, live more healthfully and share their stories.

The primary warning signs of a heart attack remain the same regardless of gender, however:

- Chest discomfort
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body
- Shortness of breath
- Breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or light headedness

Now tell us your story. Do you know anyone who experienced a heart attack or other heart condition? Are you aware of your own risk level? What could you, your friends or loved ones do differently to live more healthfully?

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