

February-National Hearth Month

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February is National Heart Month, which is particularly important for those of us who live in rural America. The number 1 cause of death for rural Americans is heart disease (southern Illinois counties 35-40%), and we get it at a much higher rate than our urban counterparts (20-25% as cause of death).

The risks of coronary artery disease (the most common cause of heart disease) are associated with cigarette smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and family history of coronary artery disease. In addition, factors such as depression and hopelessness contribute to a higher heart associated death rate in rural areas. What can we do about this?

- **Get your blood pressure measured and measure yourself.** High blood pressure is a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Controlling a blood pressure to less than 140 mm is the most impactful activity to reduce premature heart disease. High blood pressure generally starts in the 20-30's and gradually increases. Normal blood pressure is <130 mm. A diet high in sodium and caffeine contribute to elevated blood pressure.
- **Keep physically active and eat healthy** to reduce obesity. Obesity has been linked to a variety of serious chronic illnesses, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and arthritis. Not only does controlling weight improve general sense of well-being, but reduces the issues associated with poorly controlled diabetes and high blood pressure.
- **Don't smoke.** Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States and is the most significant risk factor for chronic lower respiratory disease. There is no medication that counters the negative effects of cigarettes for heart disease. There are a variety of effective of measures to help people stop smoking.

Coronary disease is caused by fat accumulation in the arteries around your heart, which eventually blocks the artery. Not all people have typical symptoms of coronary disease, particularly women and persons with diabetes. However, **get to your physician if you notice:**

- Chest pressure that may or may not radiate to the jaw, shoulder, or arm.
- Shortness of breath or extreme fatigue with movement.
- Upper abdominal pain associated with exertion

February is heart month – don't become a statistic and see your health care provider.

For more information, please contact the Carle Center for Rural Health and Farm Safety at 365-7961 or visit www.carle.org/farmsafety.