MEET TWO HEROES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HEART DISEASE.

ONSLOW: GIVING PATIENTS TOOLS TO A HEART HEALTHY FUTURE.

KNOW STROKE, KNOW THE SIGNS, ACT IN TIME

DELICIOUSLY HEALTHY DINNERS: IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

FEBRUARY 2013
The southeastern region of North Carolina is noted for many positive things, to include mild climate, relaxing lifestyle, great place to raise a family, pristine coastlines, and wonderful people. It is also noted by health experts as a region of health issues. Covering a major area of the southeastern region, Onslow County is considered to be on “the buckle” of the Stroke Belt. This negative label is due to high rates of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes in our region and in our community.

With heart disease and stroke being a major community health issue in Onslow County, the leadership at Onslow Memorial Hospital has decided to address stroke care and the ever-increasing episodes of stroke and stroke deaths as compared to declining rates elsewhere in North Carolina. The magnitude of the need to address both heart and stroke care is evident in reviewing both state and national data. The data validate these two health issues as having a major impact on the health status of our community. Awareness of this data has triggered a response of the leadership at Onslow Memorial Hospital to act to solve this growing healthcare issue. The executive team, the medical staff and the Onslow Memorial Hospital Board are accountable for the health status of our community. By this ethical accountability, the leadership at Onslow Memorial Hospital is committed to a journey to improve stroke care and heart disease care.

The initial push is toward stroke education, prevention, and treatment. The success of our journey is dependent on the passion and commitment of our Board, executive team, and clinical staff, to include our physicians, nurses, physical therapists, pharmacists, radiologists, dietitians, and other health professionals who work daily to ensure compliance with our stroke initiatives and who constantly seek opportunities to improve stroke care for better health in our community. The key component of our stroke program is our stroke nurse coordinator, who has led our stroke initiatives.

Onslow Memorial Hospital has accomplished several important milestones along our journey to improve stroke care. In 2010, Onslow Memorial Hospital was designated as Stroke Capable with the Onslow County Emergency Medical Services. In 2011, Onslow Memorial Hospital’s performance score for stroke education (95.2%) was statistically higher than the 80.4% stroke education score for North Carolina Stroke Care Collaborative registry hospitals. And in 2012, Onslow Memorial Hospital received accreditation from The Joint Commission as Advanced Primary Stroke Certified.

We all yearn for the day when heart disease and stroke will no longer be an issue in our beautiful community. Our goal is for our community to be heart healthy and stroke free. The key is for Onslow Memorial Hospital to lead the way for education, prevention and treatment. Our first priority is to increase the level of awareness by the members of our community.

Sincerely,

Ed Piper, Ph.D.
President & Chief Executive Officer
Onslow Memorial Hospital
Throughout her teaching career and even into retirement, Carol Nelson was the epitome of health. She adhered to a healthy diet; exercised regularly; managed her stress; and made healthy lifestyle choices, such as not smoking. Heart surgery and cardiac rehab were things she learned about from her neighbor, an elderly gentleman who had had quadruple bypass. It wasn’t likely to happen to her: Or so she thought.

Imagine her surprise last year when a physician told her that she would need two heart valves repaired.

“I was asymptomatic!” she explains.

But when her brother was scheduled to have a similar surgery only five weeks after hers, she knew that this was beyond her control.

Ms. Nelson was referred to Dr. Randolph Chitwood, a pioneer in robotic-assisted heart surgery at East Carolina Heart Institute in Greenville. With the da Vinci Surgical System, surgeons make three small incisions in the chest between the ribs through which they insert three robotic arms. One arm holds a tiny camera that projects three-dimensional images onto a monitor in front of the surgeon; the other two arms hold the pencil-sized instruments, which have tiny computerized mechanical “wrist” instrument tips designed to transmit the dexterity of the surgeon’s forearm, wrist and fingers into the chest at the operative site. A similar da Vinci system is used at Onslow Memorial Hospital for gynecological and urological surgeries, with great success.

Like any good teacher would do, Ms. Nelson began to come up with her lesson plan. “Before I even had the surgery, I called Onslow Memorial Hospital, because I knew the Cardiac Rehab program was great. I had heard so many great things from my neighbor and many other people. It’s a real plus for the hospital to have this program.”

When she began the program in May, she could hardly walk from the parking lot to the cardiac rehab area without being out of breath. But the camaraderie of others in the class helped her to press on. “It’s nice to be with other people who have been through the same things.”

As a retired elementary school teacher, Nelson really appreciated the education component of the program. Anatomy of the heart, diet, exercise, and stress management are all part of the curriculum.

“But it is the physical activity that works the heart muscle and gets patients back in shape, she says. In each session, patients warm up, exercise, and then cool down – all while being monitored by specially trained cardiac nurses. “Everyone feels safe and cared for,” she says. “That was so important as we regained our stamina and got our strength back!”

It was this close monitoring that helped her deal with a few setbacks, such as an atrial flutter.

As Ms. Nelson has learned, some good habits are hard to break.
LOWER HEART DISEASE RISK BY 92% WITH A SIMPLE CHANGE EACH DAY

Did you know that more than 41 million women in America have heart disease? And that more women than men will die from it? In fact, it’s the leading health problem that kills women (not cancer—a common myth). But the good news is that just five healthy lifestyle guidelines—moderate alcohol, a healthy diet, daily exercise, normal body weight, and not smoking—can cut your heart attack risk by a whopping 92%, according to a Swedish study of more than 24,000 women. Incorporating just the first two into your routine cuts your risk by more than half. The 28 tips that follow are designed to help you get started. Try one a day for a month, and then stick with as many as you can for the long haul.

www.prevention.com

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than less-bendy participants in a recent Japanese study. Stretching for 10 to 15 minutes a day may keep arteries pliable; they may be affected by the elasticity of the muscles and tissue that surround them. Try these gentle yoga moves to improve your flexibility.

**Heart Health Day 14: Unwind With a Little Wine**
You’ve probably heard that imbibing is good for you. Research overwhelmingly shows that 1 to 3 ounces of alcohol a day significantly reduces your risk of a heart attack. Unless you have a problem with alcohol, high blood pressure, or risk factors for breast or other cancer, you can safely have one alcoholic drink a day. Indulge with dinner so you sip slowly. And remember that a full pour in a large wine glass can easily double what’s considered a healthy serving.

**Heart Health Day 15: Swap In Soy**
These plant proteins can help lower cholesterol when you eat them in place of less healthy foods. (Think tofu instead of beef stir-fry or edamame in lieu of dumplings). It’s best, however, to limit processed soy (from chips and patties) and avoid soy supplements. The problem with these is that we do not always know the amount of phytoestrogens (plant chemicals in soy that function in ways similar to the hormone estrogen) in them. This can make its effects on the human body unpredictable. And exposure to high concentrations of phytoestrogens could stimulate the growth of cells that are responsive to estrogen, which include many breast cancers.

**Heart Health Day 16: Cook with Garlic**
Just one clove a day—or 300 mg 3 times daily—reduces the risk of a heart attack at least three ways: It discourages red blood cells from sticking together and blocking your arteries, it reduces arterial damage, and it discourages cholesterol from lining those arteries and making them so narrow that blockages are likely.

**Heart Health Day 17: Spice Up Your Workout**
The best exercise is one that you’ll continue to do. So every day, in addition to your regular workout, try something new just for fun—hitting a tennis ball against the house, shooting hoops with your kids, or dancing around your bedroom after work. If you find something that you like, incorporate it into your daily workout. Research shows that people who are active in little ways the entire day burn more calories and are generally healthier than those who exercise for 30 to 60 minutes and then sit at a computer, says cardiologist and Prevention advisor Arthur Agatston, MD. Need new workout ideas? See our complete guide to at-home fitness.

**Heart Health Day 18: Assess Your Stress Levels**
One of the biggest causes of stress is trying to live in a way that’s not consistent with who you are. Ask yourself: Am I doing what I want to do? Am I getting my needs met? Every day, run a reality check on what you’ve done. When it says that your actions aren’t true to the kind of person you are, make sure you listen. Spend time with people and on activities that make you feel happy and challenged in a healthy way—not drained or burned out.

**Heart Health Day 19: Meditate for 5 Minutes**
Practicing a form of meditation in which you focus awareness on the present moment can reduce the effects of daily stressors. Ride out a stress storm by simply closing your eyes and quietly focusing on your breathing for 5 to 10 minutes. (New to meditation? Check out these three new ways to meditate.)

**Heart Health Day 20: Get in Touch With Your Spiritual Side**
Studies indicate that those with regular spiritual practices who meet with a faith community—attending church or temple, for example—live longer and better and are far less likely to have a heart attack. You can still reap the benefits even if you can’t attend regularly; just getting involved socially, like volunteering at a food drive, can help.

**Heart Health Day 21: Stay Connected to Loved Ones**
Strong ties to family, friends, and community reduce anxiety and fight depression—two factors that increase your risk of a heart attack. Make a lunch date with a friend you’ve been playing phone tag with, dedicate at least 1 night a week for a sit-down family dinner, or plan to visit your place of worship. Resolve to do one of these things every day (yes, jetting off a quick thinking-of-you e-mail counts)

**Heart Health Day 22: Take Vitamin D and Fish Oil**
While research on multivitamins for preventing heart disease is mixed, science does stand behind these two supplements. "The only dietary supplement consistently shown in randomized clinical trials to work against cardiac death is fish oil," says Dariush Mozaffarian, MD, DrPH, an assistant professor medicine at Harvard Medical School. Omega-3 fatty acids stabilize the heart’s electrical system, lower blood pressure and triglycerides, slow arterial plaque buildup, and ease systemic inflammation. Fish oil was more successful than statins at preventing death in heart failure patients, according to an Italian study. Vitamin D boasts a wide range of health benefits, heart health among them.

**Heart Health Day 23: Do Something Sweet for Your Partner**
There’s a lot of proof that marriage buffers you against heart disease, but that may be true only if you’re happily coupled, says Agatston. One study in the Annals of Behavioral Medicine found that spouses who reported a lot of negative encounters with their partner had blood pressure that was, on average, five points higher than that of single people. The emotional stress of a difficult marriage typically causes adrenaline levels in the blood to spike, raising blood pressure; it can also cause blood vessels to spasm. To make sure your marriage doesn’t go on autopilot, forge little ways to stay connected all the time.

**Heart Health Day 24: Indulge in Dark Chocolate**
Cap off your day with a nibble of this healthy dessert. Dark chocolate varieties contain flavonoids, antioxidants that make blood vessels more elastic. In one study, 18% of patients who ate it every day saw blood pressure dip. Have an ounce (at least 70% cocoa) daily.

**Heart Health Day 25: Steer Clear of Secondhand Smoke**
Got friends or coworkers who smoke socially? Stay away when they light up and your heart will thank you. The effects on the cardiovascular system due to passive smoking are, on average, 80 to 90% as great as those due to active smoking, research shows. Even brief (minutes or hours) exposure to secondhand smoke can have cardiovascular effects nearly as great as long-term active smoking.

**Heart Health Day 26: Go Bananas with Potassium**
To lower your blood pressure, don’t just eat less sodium. You should also increase your potassium intake, as it speeds up the body’s sodium excretion, says researchers at the Hypertension Institute of Nashville. Lead author Mark Houston, MD, says most Americans consume more sodium than potassium, but it should be the other way around. Some popular potassium-rich foods to help fix this: baked potatoes, tomato paste, lima beans, yogurt, cantaloupe, and bananas.

**Heart Health Day 27: Cut Back on Sugar**
People who consume more than 74 g of added fructose a day (that’s two to three sweetened soft drinks) are 87% more likely to have severely elevated blood pressure than those who get less, according to a recent study. Researchers believe excess fructose may reduce the production of nitric oxide, a gas that helps blood vessels relax and dilate. To cut your intake, watch out for the worst offenders: drinks and baked goods. Drink seltzer in place of soda, or eat oatmeal with raisins and cinnamon instead of an oatmeal raisin cookie.

**Heart Health Day 28: Laugh at Yourself**
When researchers from the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore tested the “humor quotient” of 300 people, they found that those with heart disease were 40% less likely to laugh at the gaffes, mix-ups, and irritations of everyday life than those without cardiovascular problems. “Laughter is no substitute for eating properly, exercising, and controlling blood pressure and cholesterol levels with medication if need be," says study author Michael Miller, MD, director of the university’s Center for Preventive Cardiology.
Anyone who suffers and survives a serious cardiovascular event, such as a stroke or heart attack, faces a critical decision: continue on the path that led them there, or embark on a journey to health and longevity. Thankfully, many patients make the choice to walk a new path. But making this decision is just the beginning, as there are a number of challenges that can impede follow-through. This is where Onslow Memorial Hospital’s Cardiac Rehabilitation Program can make a life-saving difference.

The goal of cardiac rehab is to connect with patients who have experienced a cardiac-related event and guide them toward a healthy lifestyle. These events include a recent heart attack, coronary bypass, angina, heart valve repair or replacement, coronary artery stenting or heart pump implant. The three-month program, covered by Medicare and most insurance companies, is accredited by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Susan Watson, the program’s director at Onslow Memorial Hospital, says the benefits are clear: “Cardiac patients are healthier in the long run if they participate in rehab,” she said. In fact, when it comes to heart disease, the “long run” is an important goal, since subsequent cardiac events can be worse, or even fatal. As one supporter said, “This program has saved a lot of lives.”

Much of the aim is to alter a patient’s habitual behavior regarding diet, exercise and smoking. Because habits often can take eight weeks to break, the three-month rehab window is the perfect opportunity to make such a change.

Some of the benefits that can be expected are healthier blood sugar and pressure levels, loss of excess weight, reduced stress, and increased strength. Program staff members have noticed that just walking in from the parking lot often becomes easier for patients as they get into the rehab.

Patients’ mental and emotional well-being benefit also. Stress about their health recovery is often relieved through openly discussing their feelings. Strong friendships can be created when patients identify with, empathize with, and support one another … and, because depression is a common side effect of heart surgery, this social benefit is an important part of successful rehabilitation.

A variety of medical specialists participate in the program, focusing on the many areas that impact heart health. Each patient has a private consultation with a registered dietitian, an experienced medical professional who also teaches group sessions on dietary topics. Stress management is addressed by a psychologist, who is also available for individual counseling. An exercise physiologist establishes and reviews the exercise component, and a physician oversees the entire program.

One unique feature of the Cardiac Rehab Program at Onslow Memorial is that an experienced registered nurse (RN) supervises each case. The RN contacts the physician if any health issues arise, sometimes resolving issues over the phone and helping patients avoid an office visit. The RN also facilitates information sharing between a patient’s physician and the program’s professionals — and, of course, the patient. This sharing results in a more informed team and better patient care.

After the three-month rehabilitation, patients enter into a “maintenance” phase … one that, ideally, lasts as long as they live. For a small monthly fee, fitness equipment and assistance are made available right at the center for those patients who have a doctor’s order to exercise (the program’s staff can help obtain this for patients). This is especially appealing to those who would like to exercise with people their own age, don’t have the equipment or the discipline to exercise at home, or who might be intimidated by a gym environment.

What’s the best evidence that cardiac rehab and a dedication to maintaining or improving your health afterward can lead to longevity? The maintenance program includes a healthy number of octogenarians.
KNOW STROKE, KNOW THE SIGNS, ACT IN TIME

Stroke is the 3rd leading cause of death in the United States and a leading cause of serious, long-term disability in adults. About 600,000 new strokes are reported in the U.S. each year. The good news is that treatments are available that can greatly reduce the damage caused by a stroke. However, you need to recognize the symptoms of a stroke and get to a hospital quickly. Getting treatment within 60 minutes can prevent disability.

A stroke, sometimes called a "brain attack," occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted. When a stroke occurs, brain cells in the immediate area begin to die because they stop getting the oxygen and nutrients they need to function.

What causes a stroke?
There are 2 major kinds of stroke. The first, called an ischemic stroke, is caused by a blood clot that blocks or plugs a blood vessel or artery in the brain. About 80 percent of all strokes are ischemic. The second, known as a hemorrhagic stroke, is caused by a blood vessel in the brain that breaks and bleeds into the brain. About 20 percent of strokes are hemorrhagic.

What are the symptoms of a stroke?
The symptoms of stroke are distinct because they happen quickly:

► Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg (especially on one side of the body)
► Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech
► Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
► Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
► Sudden severe headache with no known cause

Know the Signs
Because stroke injures the brain, you may not realize that you are having a stroke. To a bystander, someone having a stroke may just look unaware or confused. Stroke victims have the best chance if someone around them recognizes the symptoms and acts quickly.

What disabilities can result from a stroke?
Although stroke is a disease of the brain, it can affect the entire body. The effects of a stroke range from mild to severe and can include paralysis, problems with thinking, problems with speaking, and emotional problems. Patients may also experience pain or numbness after a stroke.

Act in Time
Stroke is a medical emergency. Every minute counts when someone is having a stroke. The longer blood flow is cut off to the brain, the greater the damage. Immediate treatment can save people's lives and enhance their chances for successful recovery.

Why is there a need to act fast?
Ischemic strokes, the most common type of strokes, can be treated with a drug called t-PA, that dissolves blood clots obstructing blood flow to the brain. The window of opportunity to start treating stroke patients is three hours, but to be evaluated and receive treatment, patients need to get to the hospital within 60 minutes.

What is the benefit of treatment?
A five-year study by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) found that some stroke patients who received t-PA within three hours of the start of stroke symptoms were at least 30 percent more likely to recover with little or no disability after three months.

What can I do to prevent a stroke?
The best treatment for stroke is prevention. There are several risk factors that increase your chances of having a stroke:

► High blood pressure
► Heart disease
► Smoking
► Diabetes
► High cholesterol

If you smoke – quit. If you have high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, or high cholesterol, getting them under control – and keeping them under control – will greatly reduce your chances of having a stroke.

Source: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
Heroes in the Fight Against Heart Disease

Sam Gifford, OMH stroke nurse coordinator

Q: What is a stroke nurse coordinator? What are your responsibilities, both within the hospital and in the community?

A: A stroke nurse coordinator can have many different responsibilities. These responsibilities differ from facility to facility.

At Onslow, my responsibilities are vast. I regularly visit hospital patients who were admitted with a diagnosis of stroke or TIA (transient ischemic attack, often called a “mini-stroke”). I review their charts to ensure that each patient’s care meets The Joint Commission’s standards for care for stroke/TIA patients. If the opportunity for improvement is found, I educate the staff/physicians that have been involved in the care of the patients. My goal is to prevent any missed opportunities for the exceptional care of our stroke/TIA population. In addition to these tasks, I also facilitate the Stroke Team meetings and review charts of stroke/TIA patients for compliance with Joint Commission standards.

Community involvement is a key to stroke education and awareness. Therefore, I participate in community events by providing educational materials, discussion, and even free cholesterol and glucose screenings. This is vital to ensuring the education of our community. These events are hosted throughout the year by various churches, civic organizations, community groups, etc. Here at Onslow Memorial Hospital we are constantly looking for these opportunities to educate the community. We participate in both large and small events. I encourage any group that is putting on a health fair to contact Onslow Memorial so that we may participate in the event.

Q: Why was it important for OMH to become accredited by The Joint Commission as an Advanced Primary Stroke Center?

A: Previously, Vidant Medical Center was the only facility east of Interstate 95 that had this distinction. Obtaining this accreditation reinforces our plan of care and protocols currently in place to provide the needed care for stroke/TIA patients. It acknowledges that OMH’s staff is committed to maintaining a high level of compliance with The Joint Commission’s standards for stroke care. This accreditation could not have been accomplished without the staff’s previous hard work and continued work providing exceptional care to our stroke/TIA patient population.

Q: What is the hospital doing to educate its patients and the community about stroke risks?

A: While a patient at Onslow Memorial Hospital, the hospital ensures that stroke/TIA patients receive an education packet on admission, as well as daily education by a variety of staff members throughout their hospital stay. There are also videos on demand, which can be viewed on each patient’s television, that provide education about preventing strokes and living with the aftereffects of a stroke. Our goal is to provide our patients with a solid knowledge base of signs and symptoms of a stroke, and to emphasize the importance of calling 911 at the onset of any of these symptoms; following up with a primary care provider; not using tobacco, alcohol or drugs; receiving rehabilitation services; and being knowledgeable and compliant with regard to medication.

OMH participates in many community events. The goal of these events is to get as much information to the general public as possible. This is done by offering educational materials, discussion, and free stroke risk screenings (blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol checks). Prevention is the first step in stroke education. Stroke risk factors include heart disease, smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, unhealthy eating, obesity, lack of physical activity, and heavy alcohol use. The citizens of Onslow County can promote their own health and prevent disease and illness by taking steps to prevent and control stroke risk factors. It’s important to recognize the symptoms, “ACT F.A.S.T.,” and call 911.

Q: What is the incidence of stroke in Onslow County? In North Carolina?

A: Onslow County is considered to be on the belt buckle of the United States’ Stroke Belt. The Stroke Belt is an area with high rates of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and diabetes – factors that put this population at significant risk for stroke. The highest hospitalization and death rates of stroke patients are in the coastal region of North Carolina, which includes Onslow County.

Stroke is the leading cause of disability, the fourth leading cause of death in the United States, and the fourth leading cause of death in North Carolina. In 2008, there were 4,477 deaths in North Carolina caused by stroke, which was 5.8% of all deaths in that year. The deaths of stroke patients under the age of 65 account for 14.7% of all stroke deaths in North Carolina. Stroke does not just affect the elderly. There is no age that is safe from stroke. However, the risk of death caused by a stroke does increase with age.

Q: What inspired you to become a stroke nurse coordinator?

A: There were several different moments throughout my education and career that eventually led me to this role. The very first moment was in nursing school. One of the first patients I ever took care of was a stroke patient. Seeing the resolution/improvement of her symptoms over the two days I cared for her stuck in my memory. Another factor was the way my family has been affected by stroke on more than one occasion. My grandmother and my aunt both were stroke patients, and neither had a positive outcome. They both spent the remainder of their lives depending on others to provide total care for them. It taught me that stroke affects the entire family, not just the patient. This knowledge made me want to help inform the community of the dangers of stroke and the steps individuals can take to help prevent strokes.

Q: What hospital (or personal) accomplishment are you most proud of?

A: My children are my proudest accomplishment. They are the most important things in my life. They are considered in every decision I make.

Q: Do you have any advice on what people can do to reduce their stroke risk?

A: Stay healthy and active in life. Make sure to participate in daily physical exercise, whether it is taking a walk or working out in a gym. Be sure to eat healthy. Follow a heart-healthy diet by controlling your portion sizes, eating more vegetables and fruits, selecting whole grains, and limiting unhealthy fats and cholesterol. Be sure to see your primary care physician on a regular basis.
Q: What is a patient educator? What are your responsibilities, both within the hospital and in the community?

A: My role as a patient educator is to facilitate patient and family education at Onslow Memorial Hospital by identifying needs, assisting with process development, and working with various disciplines to provide education as an integral part of patient care. Educating patients and families about their disease process and home management helps to reduce anxiety, promote safety, and encourage patients and families to become an active participant in their care. I do this both in the hospital setting and at community events and health fairs.

Q: As you know, OMH is a recipient of the American Heart Association’s Get With The Guidelines® – Heart Failure Gold Quality Achievement Award. What does this accomplishment mean to you personally?

A: Receiving the AHA Gold award makes me feel very proud to be part of a team that is committed to treating patients according to the most up-to-date scientific guidelines, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of care, reducing healthcare costs, and, ultimately, saving lives.

Q: What is the incidence of heart disease in Onslow County? In North Carolina?

A: According to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, heart disease (which includes coronary heart disease, heart failure, and other types of heart diseases) was the second leading cause of death in North Carolina in 2010. It caused 17,090 deaths among North Carolinians – 22% of all deaths in that year. The highest death rates are clustered mostly in eastern North Carolina, which includes Onslow County. Heart disease results in substantial morbidity and disability in our communities. More than 100,000 hospitalizations for heart disease occur in the state each year. The highest heart disease hospitalization rates are also clustered mostly in eastern North Carolina, a pattern similar to that of heart disease death rates.

Q: What inspired you to become a patient educator?

A: I worked in the critical care arena for over 25 years, providing care to patients who were very ill. Working as a patient educator provides the opportunity to promote healthy lifestyles to prevent illness, as well as assist patients in obtaining the knowledge base and skills to meet their ongoing healthcare needs.

Q: What is your favorite part of being a patient educator?

A: When patients are diagnosed with a chronic illness, we ask them to learn various self-care skills. My favorite part of being a patient educator is meeting with patients who feel they just can’t do it, and helping them discover that they really can do it. Helping to alleviate their fear and anxiety is very rewarding.

Q: What hospital (or personal) accomplishment are you most proud of?

A: I am very proud of our recent accomplishment of receiving the AHA Gold award. Through collaborative effort, dedication, and teamwork, processes have been implemented to improve the overall quality of care for heart failure patients. It’s an accomplishment that we as an organization, our patients, their families and the whole community can feel good about.

Q: What advice would you offer Onslow County residents looking to lower their incidence of heart disease?

A: In today’s society, we live such a fast-paced life. Because we are “so busy,” we often put healthy lifestyle behaviors – such as getting regular physical activity, eating right, and quitting smoking – on the back burner. But if we practice incorporating these behaviors into our day-to-day lives, we will most certainly reap the health benefits. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is a process. We will have good days and bad days, successes and failures, gains and losses … but the overall outcome is well worth the effort. Making healthy lifestyle choices has many benefits. Not only does it decrease our risk for developing heart disease, it helps to prevent other chronic illnesses as well.

Q: What is the hospital doing to help lower the incidence of heart disease?

A: The hospital has various education resources, which include direct teaching; written materials, such as pamphlets, brochures and packets; and audiovisual aids. We offer information to our patients and families, not only about their condition, but also about ways to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent illness. Discharge instructions include community resources and referrals to facilitate the patient’s continuum of care. To promote healthy lifestyles and disease prevention, Onslow Memorial Hospital also participates in various community events, health screenings, and health fairs to improve the overall health of our community.
In addition to fresh fruits and vegetables and fresh meat, poultry, seafood, and pork, keep your kitchen stocked with the ingredients on this list to make it easier to plan and prepare the meals in these recipes. These ingredients can be used in both main-dish meals and side dishes. They are available in most grocery stores and are easy to use. Use the following ingredients below to help you prepare heart healthy meals and snacks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herbs and Spices: (add flavor)</th>
<th>Condiments, Sauces, and Other Seasonings: Add Flavor (and, a little goes a long way!)</th>
<th>Nuts, Seeds, and Beans: Low In Saturated Fat and High In Protein and Fiber</th>
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<td>Canned tomato paste, no salt added</td>
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<td>Ground black pepper</td>
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<td>Crushed red pepper</td>
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<td>Oils and Fats: Low In Saturated Fat and Trans Fat</td>
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<td>Cooking spray</td>
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<td>Nut oil (peanut, sesame)</td>
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<td>Soft tub margarine</td>
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<td>Vegetable oil (safflower, canola, corn, olive)</td>
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Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
HEART HEALTHY FOODS:
READING FOOD NUTRITION LABELS

In addition to fresh fruits and vegetables and fresh meat, poultry, seafood, and pork, keep your kitchen stocked with the ingredients on this list to make it easier to plan and prepare the meals in these recipes. These ingredients can be used in both main-dish meals and side dishes. They are available in most grocery stores and are easy to use. Use the following ingredients below to help you prepare heart healthy meals and snacks.

One of the best ways to find heart healthy products is to check the food labels. Here are some terms to look for per labeled serving to find products lower in sodium, fat, cholesterol, and calories.

**Sodium**
- Sodium-free: Less than 5 milligrams (mg) of sodium per serving
- Very low sodium: 35 mg or less of sodium per serving
- Low-sodium: 140 mg or less of sodium per serving
- Low-sodium meal: 140 mg or less of sodium per 3½ ounces
- Light (or lite) in sodium: At least 50 percent less sodium per serving than the regular version
- Reduced or less sodium: At least 25 percent less sodium per serving than the regular version
- Unsalted or no salt added: No salt added to the product during processing, but this is not necessarily a sodium-free food

If you can’t find products labeled "low-sodium," compare the Nutrition Facts panels on available products to find the one with the lowest amount of sodium.

**Cholesterol**
- Cholesterol-free: Less than 2 milligrams (mg) cholesterol and less than 2 grams (g) of saturated fat per serving
- Low cholesterol: 20 mg or less cholesterol and less than 2 g of saturated fat per serving
- Reduced or less cholesterol: At least 25 percent less cholesterol than the regular version and less than 2 g of saturated fat per serving
- Fat
- Fat-free: Less than ½ gram (g) of fat per serving
- Saturated fat-free: Less than ½ g of saturated fat and less than ½ g of trans fat per serving
- Low-saturated fat: 1 g or less of saturated fat and 15 percent or less calories from saturated fat per serving
- Low-fat: 3 g or less of fat per serving
- Reduced fat: At least 25 percent less fat per serving than the regular version
- Light in fat: Half the fat per serving (or less) than the regular version

**Calories**
- Calorie-free: Less than 5 calories per serving
- Low-calorie: 40 calories or less per serving
- Low-calorie meal: 120 calories (or less) per 3½ ounces
- Reduced or less calories: At least 25 percent fewer calories per serving than the regular version
- Light (or lite): Half the fat (or less) or a third of calories per serving of the regular version

Source: U.S. Department of Health & Human Service
You can control the following risk factors by making lifestyle changes. Your doctor might also suggest medicine to help control some risk factors, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

**High blood pressure**
High blood pressure is the biggest risk factor for stroke. It makes you four to six times more likely to have a stroke.

**Heart disease**
The second biggest risk factor for stroke is heart disease, especially a condition called atrial fibrillation. In atrial fibrillation, the top chambers of the heart beat faster than the rest of the heart. The top chambers also beat more irregularly. This means that the blood doesn't flow through the heart correctly. This can cause clotting. The clots may come loose and travel to the brain, causing a stroke.

**Diabetes**
Diabetes is a disease in which blood glucose (sugar) levels are too high. Uncontrolled diabetes damages blood vessels throughout the body and in the brain. Because of this damage, having diabetes triples your risk of stroke.

**Blood cholesterol levels**
High LDL (bad) cholesterol levels and low HDL (good) cholesterol can cause plaque buildup in your arteries. This can increase your risk of stroke.

**Obesity**
Postmenopausal women with a high blood triglyceride level and a waist size larger than 35 inches are five times more likely to have a stroke than other women.

**Cigarette smoking**
Cigarette smoking has also been linked to plaque buildup in the carotid artery (a major artery that leads to your brain). Smoking increases your stroke risk in several other ways. The nicotine in cigarettes can raise your blood pressure. Carbon monoxide from smoking reduces the amount of oxygen your blood carries to your brain. Finally, cigarette smoking can actually make your blood thicker and more likely to clot.

**Birth control pills or patch**
Birth control pills and patches are usually safe for young, healthy women. But women on birth control pills who smoke or have migraines with aura (visual disturbances) have an increased risk of stroke. Women on the patch who smoke also have an increased risk. Researchers still don't know whether migraines increase stroke risk for women on the patch.

**Menopausal hormone therapy**
Hormone therapy used to treat menopausal symptoms and prevent osteoporosis can increase stroke risk. If you use menopausal hormone therapy, take the lowest dose for the shortest time. Your doctor can talk more about the benefits and possible risks of menopausal hormone therapy.

**Pregnancy**
Rarely, pregnancy can cause stroke, especially in the first few months after delivery. Pregnancy increases blood pressure, and clots are more easily formed.

**Heavy alcohol use, illegal drug use**
For women, more than one alcoholic drink a day raises stroke risk. Cocaine use is a common cause of stroke in young people. Long-term marijuana smoking may also be a risk factor for stroke.
HEART HEALTH TIPS COME IN HANDY NO MATTER THE WEATHER

Weather and temperature outdoors can have a large impact on energy levels and motivation to exercise.

Warm, sunny weather can beckon one outdoors, while cold or rainy weather could keep one hibernating inside -- which is not good for the spirit or the body, including cardiovascular health.

Staying active when the weather seems to be pitted against you can be challenging. However, there are many things you can do to make the best of things and still get the exercise needed for a healthy heart. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Head outdoors:
Instead of the regular workouts you do, consider something that makes the most of the weather outdoors. If it's hot outside, consider walking by the seaside where the ocean mist can keep you cool, or having your feet in the laps of water reaching the sand. Unless you are the Wicked Witch of the West, a little rainfall will not make you melt. Don a raincoat and take a brisk walk around the neighborhood. If it's cold outdoors or if there's an residual snow sledding or skiing remain fun ways to burn calories. All of these activities count as moderate to vigorous exercise, which is recommended daily for most people.

Workout indoors:
This doesn't necessarily mean heading to the nearest gym. It's possible to get recommended exercise at home or at another location. Walking briskly around a mall is good exercise and you can window shop in the process. Lift heavy items around the house in place of dumbbells. Doing regular household chores with more vigor is another way to get blood flowing and your heart pumping.

Eat right:
It's far too easy to indulge in comfort foods, but they tend to be fattening. Eating the right foods to maintain a healthy weight goes a long way toward protecting the heart. Be sure to eat breakfast every day, and choose fruits and vegetables as snacks over sweet and salty items. Canned varieties are just as healthy as fresh produce and can offer a variety of flavors when certain foods are not in season. Be sure to include plenty of foods high in fiber. Not only will they help keep cholesterol levels in check, but it will also help you to feel full faster and longer.

Dress appropriately: Weather is often unpredictable. Therefore, dress in layers so you can remove or add clothing as needed to remain comfortable. Children and older adults are more susceptible to the effects of cold weather. According to Jersey Shore University Medical Center, when temperatures are low your heart works harder to keep the body warm. Dressing warmly can help avoid taxing the heart. The same caution applies when the temperature is extremely warm. It's easy for the elderly to overheat and become dehydrated. Dress in light clothing and remember to drink plenty of water.

Before starting any exercise regimen, it is important to discuss your plans with a physician. He or she can determine if you are physically capable of moderate exercise or if any illnesses may impede your ability.
Joint Commission Awards Advanced Stroke Certification to Onslow Memorial Hospital

Onslow Memorial Hospital’s stroke program has earned The Joint Commission’s Gold Seal of Approval™ - an internationally recognized symbol of quality. This distinction is held by only a handful of hospitals east of I-95.

“The people of Onslow County and Eastern North Carolina are blessed to be served by caring, compassionate, skilled professionals at Onslow Memorial Hospital,” said Jamie McGlaughon, a stroke survivor and member of the Onslow County Hospital Authority. “They are constantly working to bring the highest level of life-saving care to our loved ones.”

As part of a rigorous on-site survey this month, the Joint Commission evaluated the hospital for compliance with standards of care specific to the needs of patients and families, including infection prevention and control, leadership and medication management. Onslow’s high level of compliance with the Joint Commission standards and the staff’s commitment to stroke care earned the hospital its designation as an Advanced Primary Stroke Center.

“Certification is a voluntary process and I commend Onslow for successfully undertaking this challenge to elevate its standard of care and instill confidence in the community it serves.”

The Joint Commission’s Disease-Specific Care Certification Program, launched in 2002, is designed to evaluate clinical programs across the continuum of care. Certification requirements address three core areas: compliance with consensus-based national standards; effective use of evidence-based clinical practice guidelines to manage and optimize care; and an organized approach to performance measurement and improvement activities.

“With Joint Commission certification, we are making a significant investment in quality on a day-to-day basis from the top down,” said Jo Malfitano DNP, MBA, RN, CPHQ, NE-BC. Dr. Malfitano is the hospital’s manager of performance improvement and accreditation. “Achieving Joint Commission certification in stroke for our organization, is a major step toward maintaining excellence and continually improving the care we provide.”

Onslow Memorial Hospital, originally founded in 1944, stands as a 162-bed acute care, community hospital serving the city of Jacksonville and greater Onslow County. Onslow Memorial Hospital is nationally accredited by The Joint Commission (TJC).

An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation’s oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Learn more about The Joint Commission at www.jointcommission.org.

OMH announces Get With The Guidelines Heart Failure Gold Achievement Award

Onslow Memorial Hospital is proud to announce that it has received the Get With The Guidelines®-Heart Failure Gold Quality Achievement Award from the American Heart Association. The recognition signifies that OMH has reached an aggressive goal of treating heart failure patients with 85 percent compliance for at least 24 months to core standard levels of care as outlined by the American Heart Association/American College of Cardiology secondary prevention guidelines for heart failure patients. Get With The Guidelines is a quality improvement initiative that provides hospital staff with tools that follow proven evidence-based guidelines and procedures in caring for heart failure patients to prevent future hospitalizations.

Under Get With The Guidelines-Heart Failure, heart failure patients are started on aggressive risk reduction therapies such as cholesterol-lowering drugs, beta-blockers, ACE inhibitors, aspirin, diuretics and anticoagulants while in the hospital. They also receive alcohol/drug use and thyroid management counseling as well as referrals for cardiac rehabilitation before being discharged.

According to the American Heart Association, about 5.7 million people suffer from heart failure. Statistics also show that, each year, 670,000 new cases are diagnosed and more than 277,000 people will die of heart failure.
Keep Your Heart Healthy
Take Steps Today to Lower Your Risk for Heart Disease

Know your numbers
High blood pressure and cholesterol levels can cause heart disease and heart attack.

Get your cholesterol checked
Men need their cholesterol checked at least once every 5 years. Women at risk for heart disease need their cholesterol checked once every 5 years. Some men and women may need to get their cholesterol checked more often.

Know your family’s health history.
Your family’s health history can give your doctor or nurse important information about your risk for heart disease.

Quit smoking
When you quit smoking, your risk of having a heart attack goes down. Call 1-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) for free support and to set up your quit plan.

Watch your weight
Extra weight can lead to high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes. If you are overweight or obese, losing just 10 pounds can lower your risk of heart disease.

Eat healthy
A heart healthy diet includes foods that are low in cholesterol, fat, and sodium (salt).

Get active
Regular physical activity can help prevent heart disease. Aim for 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each week. This includes walking fast, dancing, and biking. If you are just getting started, try walking for 10 minutes a day a few days a week. Then add more activity over time.

Get your blood pressure checked
Starting at age 18, get your blood pressure checked at least once every 2 years. High blood pressure has no signs or symptoms.

Take steps to prevent type 2 diabetes
When you have diabetes, there is too much glucose (sugar) in your blood. Over time, if it’s not controlled, diabetes can cause serious health problems like heart disease, stroke, and blindness.

Manage stress
Managing stress can help prevent serious health problems like heart disease, depression, and high blood pressure.

Drink alcohol only in moderation
If you choose to drink alcohol, only have a moderate amount. This means no more than 1 drink a day for women and no more than 2 drinks a day for men.

Talk to your doctor about taking aspirin every day
Aspirin can improve the flow of blood to the heart and brain. This reduces your risk of heart attack or stroke. Aspirin is not recommended for everyone. Your doctor can help you decide if aspirin is the right choice for you.

Know your family’s health history.
Your family’s health history can give your doctor or nurse important information about your risk for heart disease.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Heart Health
Changing your eating habits can be tough. Start with these eight strategies to kick-start your way toward a heart-healthy diet.

1. **Eat more vegetables and fruits**
   Vegetables and fruits are good sources of vitamins and minerals. Vegetables and fruits are also low in calories and rich in dietary fiber. Vegetables and fruits contain substances found in plants that may help prevent cardiovascular disease. Eating more fruits and vegetables may help you eat less high-fat foods, such as meat, cheese and snack foods.
   Featuring vegetables and fruits in your diet can be easy. Keep vegetables washed and cut in your refrigerator for quick snacks. Keep fruit in a bowl in your kitchen so that you'll remember to eat it. Choose recipes that have vegetables or fruits as the main ingredient, such as vegetable stir-fry or fresh fruit mixed into salads.

2. **Select whole grains**
   Whole grains are good sources of fiber and other nutrients that play a role in regulating blood pressure and heart health. You can increase the amount of whole grains in a heart-healthy diet by making simple substitutions for refined grain products. Be adventurous and try a new whole grain, such as whole-grain couscous, quinoa or barley.

3. **Limit unhealthy fats and cholesterol**
   Limiting how much saturated and trans fats you eat is an important step to reduce your blood cholesterol and lower your risk of coronary artery disease. A high blood cholesterol level can lead to a buildup of plaques in your arteries, called atherosclerosis, which can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke.

   **Guidelines for how much fat and cholesterol to include in a heart-healthy diet:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of fat</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturated fat</td>
<td>Less than 7% of your total daily calories, or less than 14 g of saturated fat if you follow a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans fat</td>
<td>Less than 1% of your total daily calories, or less than 2 g of trans fat if you follow a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
<td>Less than 300 mg a day for healthy adults; less than 200 mg a day for adults with high levels cholesterol or those who are taking cholesterol-lowering medication</td>
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   The best way to reduce saturated and trans fats in your diet is to limit the amount of solid fats — butter, margarine and shortening — you add to food when cooking and serving. You can also reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet by trimming fat off your meat or choosing lean meats with less than 10 percent fat.

   You can also use low-fat substitutions when possible for a heart-healthy diet. For example, top your baked potato with salsa or low-fat yogurt rather than butter, or use low-sugar fruit spread on your toast instead of margarine.

   **Choose**
   Olive oil; Canola oil; Margarine that's free of trans fats; Cholesterol-lowering margarine, such as Benecol, Promise Activ or Smart Balance

   **Limit**
   Butter; Lard; Bacon fat; Gravy; Cream sauce; Nondairy creamers; Hydrogenated margarine and shortening; Cocoa butter, found in chocolate; Coconut, palm, cottonseed and palm-kernel oils

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**Control your portion size**
How much you eat is just as important as what you eat. Overloading your plate, taking seconds and eating until you feel stuffed can lead to eating more calories, fat and cholesterol than you should. Portions served in restaurants are often more than anyone needs. Keep track of the number of servings you eat — and use proper serving sizes — to help control your portions.

A serving size is a specific amount of food, defined by common measurements such as cups, ounces or pieces. For example, one serving of pasta is 1/2 cup, or about the size of a hockey puck.

A serving of meat, fish or chicken is 2 to 3 ounces, or about the size and thickness of a deck of cards. Judging serving size is a learned skill. You may need to use measuring cups and spoons or a scale until you’re comfortable with your judgment.

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**Eat more vegetables and fruits**
Vegetables and fruits are good sources of vitamins and minerals. Vegetables and fruits are also low in calories and rich in dietary fiber. Vegetables and fruits contain substances found in plants that may help prevent cardiovascular disease. Eating more fruits and vegetables may help you eat less high-fat foods, such as meat, cheese and snack foods.

Featuring vegetables and fruits in your diet can be easy. Keep vegetables washed and cut in your refrigerator for quick snacks. Keep fruit in a bowl in your kitchen so that you'll remember to eat it. Choose recipes that have vegetables or fruits as the main ingredient, such as vegetable stir-fry or fresh fruit mixed into salads.

**Choose**
Fresh or frozen vegetables and fruits
Low-sodium canned vegetables
Canned fruit packed in juice or water

**Avoid**
Coconut
Vegetables with creamy sauces
Fried or breaded vegetables
Canned fruit packed in heavy syrup
Frozen fruit with sugar added

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**Select whole grains**
Whole grains are good sources of fiber and other nutrients that play a role in regulating blood pressure and heart health. You can increase the amount of whole grains in a heart-healthy diet by making simple substitutions for refined grain products. Be adventurous and try a new whole grain, such as whole-grain couscous, quinoa or barley.

**Choose**
Whole-wheat flour
Whole-grain bread, preferably 100% whole-wheat bread or 100% whole-grain bread
High-fiber cereal with 5 g or more of fiber in a serving
Whole grains such as brown rice, barley, buckwheat
Whole-grain pasta
Oatmeal (steel-cut or regular)
Ground flaxseed

**Avoid**
White, refined flour; White bread; Muffins; Frozen waffles; Corn bread; Doughnuts; Biscuits; Quick breads; Granola bars; Cakes; Pies; Egg noodles; Buttered popcorn; High-fat snack crackers
Choose low-fat protein sources
Lean meat, poultry and fish, low-fat dairy products, and egg whites or egg substitutes are some of your best sources of protein. But be careful to choose lower fat options, such as skim milk rather than whole milk and skinless chicken breasts rather than fried chicken patties.
Fish is another good alternative to high-fat meats. And certain types of fish are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which can lower blood fats called triglycerides. You'll find the highest amounts of omega-3 fatty acids in cold-water fish, such as salmon, mackerel and herring. Other sources are flaxseed, walnuts, soybeans and canola oil.
Legumes — beans, peas and lentils — also are good sources of protein and contain less fat and no cholesterol, making them good substitutes for meat. Substituting plant protein for animal protein — for example, a soy or bean burger for a hamburger — will reduce your fat and cholesterol intake.

Choose
Low-fat dairy products such as skim or low-fat (1%) milk, yogurt and cheese; Egg whites or egg substitutes; Fish, especially fatty, cold-water fish, such as salmon; Skinless poultry; Legumes; Soybeans and soy products, for example, soy burgers and tofu; Lean ground meats
Avoid
Full-fat milk and other dairy products; Organ meats, such as liver; Egg yolks; Fatty and marbled meats; Spareribs; Cold cuts; Hot dogs and sausages; Bacon; Fried or breaded meats

Reduce the sodium in your food
Eating a lot of sodium can contribute to high blood pressure, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Reducing sodium is an important part of a heart-healthy diet. The Department of Agriculture recommends:
Healthy adults have no more than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium a day (about a teaspoon)
People age 51 or older, African-Americans, and people who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic kidney disease have no more than 1,500 mg of sodium a day
Although reducing the amount of salt you add to food at the table or while cooking is a good first step, much of the salt you eat comes from canned or processed foods, such as soups and frozen dinners. Eating fresh foods and making your own soups and stews can reduce the amount of salt you eat. If you like the convenience of canned soups and prepared meals, look for ones with reduced sodium.
Be wary of foods that claim to be lower in sodium because they are seasoned with sea salt instead of regular table salt — sea salt has the same nutritional value as regular salt.

Choose
Herbs and spices; Salt substitutes; Reduced-salt canned soups or prepared meals; Reduced-salt versions of condiments, such as reduced-salt soy sauce and reduced-salt ketchup
Avoid
Table salt; Canned soups and prepared foods, such as frozen dinners; Tomato juice; Soy sauce

Plan ahead: Create daily menus
You know what foods to feature in your heart-healthy diet and which ones to limit. Now it's time to put your plans into action.
Create daily menus using the six strategies listed above. When selecting foods for each meal and snack, emphasize vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Choose lean protein sources and limit high-fat and salty foods. Watch your portion sizes and add variety to your menu choices. For example, if you have grilled salmon one evening, try a black-bean burger the next night. This helps ensure that you'll get all of the nutrients your body needs. Variety also makes your meals and snacks more interesting.

Allow yourself an occasional treat
Allow yourself an indulgence every now and then. A candy bar or handful of potato chips won't derail your heart-healthy diet. But don't let it turn into an excuse for giving up on your healthy-eating plan. If overindulgence is the exception, rather than the rule, you'll balance things out over the long term. What's important is that you eat healthy foods most of the time.
Incorporate these eight tips into your life, and you'll continue to find that heart-healthy eating is both doable and enjoyable. With planning and a few simple substitutions, you can eat with your heart in mind.
Here are some of the supplements that may benefit your heart:

- Fish oil
- Plant sterols
- Niacin
- Fiber (psyllium)
- Red yeast rice
- Green tea extract
- B-Complex vitamins (B6, B12, folic acid)
- Coenzyme Q10
- Policosanol

A few cautionary notes: Always check with your doctor before using supplements because some can interact with other drugs you take. Some people -- including women who are pregnant or breastfeeding -- should not take supplements other than prenatal vitamins. Make sure you purchase supplements that have a standardized dosage, approved by the USP (United States Pharmacopoeia), which means they contain 95% to 100% of the active ingredient.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids (Fish Oil, Flaxseed Oil) for Heart Health

Omega-3 fatty acids -- found in fish oil, flaxseed oil, and algae oil -- provide significant reductions in triglyceride levels and increases in good HDL cholesterol. Omega-3 doesn't affect “bad” LDL cholesterol levels.

“Omega-3s have consistently been shown to improve heart health," says Guarneri. "Omega-3s are one of the most important supplements for the heart because of its anti-inflammatory agents. We know that inflammation is a common pathway for many diseases, including heart disease and Alzheimer’s disease."

Several studies report that in people with a history of heart attack, regularly eating oily fish (like salmon) or taking fish oil supplements reduces the risk of heart rhythm problems, heart attack, and sudden death. There may also be reductions in angina (chest pain).

Fish oil supplements can reduce triglycerides by 20% to 50%, says Guarneri. "Fish oil is now available by prescription -- that’s how good it is." However, because fish oil comes from real fish, mercury content is an issue. "You have to stick with brands that are tested for mercury," she notes. Check the labels.

She advises taking 1 to 4 grams of fish oil daily -- containing 240 milligrams of DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and 360 milligrams of EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) per gram. However, the prescribed dosage will vary depending on the patient’s blood samples. "With very high triglycerides, we might use higher doses," she says. High doses of omega-3 supplements -- over 3 grams daily -- may increase the risk of bleeding and should be done only under a doctor’s care.

If you’re taking a statin drug to lower your cholesterol, fish oil provides added heart benefits, Guarneri says. A large Japanese study showed 19% fewer heart-related events (like heart attack) in adults taking a fish oil supplement plus a statin drug, compared with those taking only a statin.

Taking fish oil plus a magnesium supplement is also a good combination -- decreasing blood pressure and preventing heart rhythm problems, Guarneri adds. Look for glycinated magnesium, which is more easily absorbed.

She’s not as big on flaxseed oil because results are not so dependable, Guarneri says. "Flaxseed oil has to be converted in the body, and conversion will vary from person to person depending on age and metabolism. But flax is soluble fiber and can lower LDL by 8% to 18% with doses of 40 to 50 grams per day."

Plant Sterols for Heart Health

Plant sterols are derived from plant-based foods and are used to enrich margarines and other foods. Many human and animal studies have found that plant sterol-enriched products lower total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol. Plant sterols do not affect triglycerides or HDL levels, however.

"Plant sterols block cholesterol absorption and lower LDL by 10%," Guarneri says. "They also work synergistically with statins and can be more effective than doubling the statin dose." Taking a statin plus plant sterol supplement can reduce LDL by 20%.

Numerous studies have shown that eating more plant sterol-enriched foods lowers total and LDL cholesterol. In a
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

study of 194 adults with moderately high cholesterol, each consumed 2 servings of low-fat milk that was plant sterol-enriched. By the third week, their LDL cholesterol was reduced by 9.5%; by week six, LDL was 7.8% reduced.

Although some margarine and other specialized foods are made with plant sterols, Guarneri recommends powdered plant sterols because she says it’s easier to make sure you’re getting the recommended 2 grams per day.

Niacin for Heart Health

Also known as vitamin B-3 or nicotinic acid, niacin is a well-accepted treatment for high cholesterol. “Niacin is one of my favorites,” Guarneri says. “It is tried and true in raising HDL and lowering triglycerides.” She prescribes from 500 milligrams to 2 grams daily, depending on the patient’s blood levels.

Numerous studies have shown that niacin can significantly improve HDL cholesterol with better results than with statin drugs. Niacin can also improve LDL levels, but less dramatically. “Niacin is one of the most powerful vitamins -- increasing HDL by 15% to 30%, reducing triglycerides by 20% to 50%,” she says.

A very small percentage of patients who take niacin have heart rhythm problems. Some people do get hot flushes from niacin, so it’s important to start with small doses and increase slowly, under a doctor’s supervision. Pre-treating the niacin dose with aspirin (that many heart patients are taking anyway) can help to prevent the discomfort associated with the flushing.

Psyllium for Heart Health

Psyllium (ispaghula) comes from the husks of seeds from Plantago ovata. Psyllium, either through supplements or high-fiber foods, provides fiber that can reduce total and LDL cholesterol. Fiber’s effects on HDL “good” cholesterol are less clear, although some research suggests fiber may help increase HDL.

Guarneri likes fiber, including psyllium. Just 15 grams of psyllium reduces LDL by up to 9%, she reports. Psyllium also boosts the effects of statin drugs. In an eight-week study, one group of patients took 10 milligrams of psyllium plus 10 milligrams of Zocor, a statin drug. They were compared to patients taking 20 milligrams of Zocor plus a placebo. In the psyllium group, LDL fell by 63, compared with 55 in the statin-only group.

One caution: Psyllium can decrease absorption of other medications. Make sure you talk to your doctor before taking psyllium.

Red Yeast Rice for Heart Health

Red yeast rice is derived from a specific yeast that grows on rice. This extract has been shown to lower total and LDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels, help prevent heart attack, and improve blood flow. “If you want to reduce LDL cholesterol, red yeast rice can do it,” says Guarneri. In fact, it contains a substance -- monacolin K -- that is identical to the active ingredient of the cholesterol-lowering statin drug Mevacor.

“Whether a red yeast rice supplement works or not depends on the formulation. There are many formulations, many brands. Some work, some don’t. Ultimately, the only way to know is to get your cholesterol checked -- start taking red yeast rice at the therapeutic dosage of 2400 mg a day -- then re-check cholesterol in two months.”

If you don’t see a change, Guarneri suggests trying a different brand of red yeast rice supplement. However, high cholesterol is a serious condition and should not be taken lightly. Make sure your doctor is aware you’re trying red yeast rice, so the two of you can decide if and when you need a prescription medication.

“There are good products on the market in high-end health food stores,” she adds. Most red yeast rice supplements in the U.S. recommend taking no more than 2,400 milligrams daily. Higher doses increase the risk of side effects, such as muscle pain and tenderness, and possibly liver damage. In addition, do not take red yeast rice if you’re taking a statin cholesterol-lowering medication as this further increases the risk of side effects.

Red yeast rice should not be used by people with liver disease. In addition, it may increase the risk of bleeding and should be used with caution by people taking blood thinners.

Green Tea Extract for Heart Health

Green tea extract is made from the dried leaves of Camellia sinensis, a perennial evergreen shrub. Green tea is a staple in Chinese traditional medicine.

This supplement is one of Guarneri’s favorites and is shown to decrease LDL by 16%. She advises 375 milligrams of theaflavin-enriched green tea extract daily.

B Vitamins: B-6 (pyridoxine), B-12, and Folic Acid for Heart Health

B-complex vitamins, including folic acid, help keep nerves and red blood cells healthy. They may also lower blood levels of homocysteine, an amino acid that’s possibly linked to heart disease, blood clots, heart attack, and strokes.

However, in May 2008, a study of more than 5,000 women at high risk of heart disease showed that daily folic acid, vitamin B-6, and B-12 supplementation did not reduce the rate of heart attacks, despite lowering levels of the amino acid homocysteine. The study appears in The Journal of the American Medical Association.

“I’m not ready to throw out B-vitamins yet for heart patients. That is still controversial. It’s important to remember that B vitamins are not just for cardiac issues,” Guarneri says.

“The bigger issue is inflammation associated with high homocysteine levels. Lowering homocysteine may help the heart, but it is also necessary to prevent osteoporosis and cognitive decline.”

She also says it’s important to get the right dosage of B-vitamins -- either from a naturopathic doctor or another physician who understands the complexity of lowering homocysteine with B-vitamins.

More studies are needed to fully understand the link between homocysteine and vitamin supplements, researchers say.

Coenzyme Q10 for Heart Health

Coenzyme Q10 is produced by the body and is necessary for basic cell functioning. Small studies have suggested that CoQ10 may reduce chest pain (angina). For people with clogged arteries, CoQ10 may make exercise easier.

Guarneri recommends CoQ10 supplements for patients taking statin drugs for high cholesterol; it may help to prevent the muscle pains or liver damage that occurs in some people taking statin drugs, though the research on this connection isn’t definitive. Some researchers believe that statins may block the natural formation of CoQ10 in muscle cells, which could contribute to heart muscle damage. Again, the evidence on this isn’t clear. A 2008 Canadian study showed that statins did not significantly reduce tissue concentrations of CoQ10.

Policosanol for Heart Health

Policosanol is a natural plant mixture used to lower cholesterol. Studies have shown policosanol helps reduce LDL cholesterol.

An analysis of 52 studies found that taking policosanol reduced LDL cholesterol by 24%; taking plant sterols reduced LDL by 10%. Policosanol also improved total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and triglyceride levels more favorably than plant sterols.

Guarneri, however, is not a big fan of policosanol. No large studies of policosanol have been conducted in the United States.

A cautionary note: Don’t take policosanol if you’re taking blood thinners or drugs that lower cholesterol. Talk to your doctor first.

Soy for Heart Health

Soy has been shown to decrease total and LDL cholesterol, with smaller benefits to triglycerides. However, soy supplements have not been proven to reduce long-term risk of heart attack or stroke.

Two big cautions: Women with hormone-sensitive cancers (breast, ovarian, uterine cancer) or endometriosis may be advised not to take soy. People taking blood-thinning drugs should also talk to their doctors before taking soy.

Other Herbs, Spices, Extracts

Artichoke leaf extract, yarrow, and holy basil may help lower cholesterol, according to early studies. These and other commonly used herbs and spices -- like ginger, turmeric, and rosemary -- are being studied for their potential in preventing heart disease.

Globe artichoke leaf has become increasingly available in the United States. Preliminary studies suggest that these extracts may reduce total cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Multiple studies of garlic extract have reported small reductions in total and LDL cholesterol over short periods of time (4 to 12 weeks), but it’s not clear whether this benefit is lasting or short-term. Also, effects on HDL are not clear.
How Do I Find Out if I Am at Risk for Heart Disease?

The first step toward heart health is becoming aware of your own personal risk for heart disease. Some risks, such as smoking cigarettes, are obvious: every woman knows whether or not she smokes. But other risk factors, such as high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol, generally don’t have obvious signs or symptoms. So you’ll need to gather some information to create your personal “heart profile.”

You and Your Doctor: A Heart Healthy Partnership

A crucial step in determining your risk is to see your doctor for a thorough checkup. Your doctor can be an important partner in helping you set and reach goals for heart health. But don’t wait for your doctor to mention heart disease or its risk factors. Many doctors don’t routinely bring up the subject with women patients. Here are some tips for establishing good, clear communication between you and your doctor:

Speak up.
Tell your doctor you want to keep your heart healthy and would like help in achieving that goal. Ask questions about your chances of developing heart disease and how you can lower your risk.

Keep tabs on treatment.
If you already are being treated for heart disease or heart disease risk factors, ask your doctor to review your treatment plan with you. Ask: Is what I’m doing in line with the latest recommendations? Are my treatments working? Are my risk factors under control? If your doctor recommends a medical procedure, ask about its benefits and risks. Find out if you will need to be hospitalized and for how long, and what to expect during the recovery period.

Be open.
When your doctor asks you questions, answer as honestly and fully as you can. While certain topics may seem quite personal, discussing them openly can help your doctor find out your chances of developing heart disease. It can also help your doctor work with you to reduce your risk. If you already have heart disease, briefly describe each of your symptoms. Include when each symptom started, how often it happens, and whether it has been getting worse.

Keep it simple.
If you don’t understand something your doctor says, ask for an explanation in simple language. Be especially sure you understand how to take any medication you are given. If you are worried about understanding what the doctor says, or if you have trouble hearing, bring a friend or relative with you to your appointment. You may want to ask that person to write down the doctor’s instructions for you.

*Source: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute*

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Many people mistakenly assume cardiac arrest and heart attack are the same thing. However, sudden cardiac arrest is not a heart attack. In fact, there are distinguishable differences between the two that are best explained by detailing what is actually happening when someone is suffering from either one.

■ What happens during a heart attack?
During a heart attack, blockage occurs in one or more of the heart's arteries. That blockage subsequently prevents the heart from receiving enough oxygen-rich blood. Research indicates that many people with symptoms of a heart attack actually delay seeking treatment for more than two hours.

In a 2010 study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, researchers found the average delay in arriving at the hospital after the start of a heart attack was roughly two and a half hours. Eleven percent of the more than 100,000 cases examined in the study waited more than 12 hours from the start of symptoms before seeking treatment. Those symptoms can include chest discomfort, shortness of breath and discomfort in other areas of the body that do not improve after five minutes.

■ What happens during cardiac arrest?
When a person is experiencing cardiac arrest, their heart's electrical system is malfunctioning and suddenly becomes irregular: The heart begins to beat very fast while the ventricles may flutter or quiver. Blood is not being delivered to the body during cardiac arrest, and a genuine fear is that blood flow to the brain will be reduced so drastically that a person may lose consciousness.

Unlike a heart attack, cardiac arrest requires immediate treatment. It's best to seek treatment promptly for both a heart attack and cardiac arrest, but those experiencing cardiac arrest are at much greater risk of death if treatment is not sought immediately. Men and women, young and old, should also keep in mind that heart attack can sometimes lead into cardiac arrest, highlighting the importance of seeking treatment as soon as any symptoms of heart attack begin to appear.

■ How are heart attack and cardiac arrest prevented?
The goal is to keep blood flowing through the body as smoothly as possible. This means avoiding blood clots and the build-up of plaque in the arteries. That might sound simple enough, but plaque build-up and the process of coronary artery disease has been shown to begin as far back as childhood, when diets are not typically tailored to avoid heart disease.

While it's impossible to go back in time and change certain lifestyle habits, including diet and exercise routines and regimens, there are ways adults can reduce the build-up of plaque, which can help them avoid falling victim to heart attack and cardiac arrest.

■ Exercise regularly.
At least 30 minutes of daily exercise is recommended.

■ Eat a healthy diet.
A diet low in saturated fat, which almost always equates to eating less red meat, and high in fruits and vegetables is ideal.

■ Stop smoking.
For those who have never smoked or have quit smoking, keep it up. Those who have or continue to smoke, stop.

■ Don't procrastinate.
These changes can't wait until tomorrow. As mentioned above, the process or coronary artery disease doesn't wait for adulthood, and adults who need to make changes cannot afford to drag their feet. The good news is studies have indicated that even those with heart disease can expect to live longer if they simply commit to the necessary lifestyle changes.

For more information about heart attack and cardiac arrest, visit the American Heart Association Web site at www.heart.org.
Now that the holidays are over, many of us are looking to tone, tighten and shrink the parts of our bodies that expanded during the season of sweet treats and family feasts. While looking physically fit is one major motivator for aerobic exercise and getting in shape, perhaps a more important motivator is heart health. Aerobic exercise is important for maintaining a healthy heart.

“Cardio workouts help you lose weight, but they also keep your blood flowing stronger,” says Chappriel Pitt, a cardio kickboxing instructor. “It also increases stamina and helps ward off illnesses.”

Here are a few tips to making the most of your workout:

- **Be consistent.**
  When embarking on a new exercise regimen, set a schedule that allows you to be consistent. Make sure you can get at least 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a few days a week. “You don’t have to be the best or the fastest at the activities you choose,” says Brittney Coley, exercise specialist at Lenoir Memorial Cardiac Rehab and Minges Wellness Center. “You just have to stay motivated and be consistent.”
  - **Set goals.**
    Whether you want to shed a few pounds or strengthen your heart, setting realistic goals can help you achieve a positive outcome. Try SMART goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. Then work toward one goal at a time to keep from getting overwhelmed. If you’re not a self-motivator, try working with a professional. He or she can help you determine how to exercise and what will benefit you most.
  - **Check your breathing.**
    Cardio workouts get your heart pumping, which may lead to shortness of breath. When exercising, make sure you’re getting enough air. Holding your breath shortens oxygen intake, which keeps you from optimum performance. Breathing too vigorously, or “panic breathing,” doesn’t help either. Instead, work at a pace that allows you to breathe as naturally as possible.
  - **Be honest.**
    If you think you need to push yourself to make your workout count, think again. If you work with a trainer, maintain good communication with him or her. Step out if you need to, and come back stronger next time. Prevent injuries and unnecessary stress by doing your best without overdoing it.
  - **Exercise with a friend.**
    Do you have a family member or friend who also wants to establish a healthier lifestyle? Work together and hold each other accountable. Having encouragement from a friend will be more motivating and fun.
  - **Be realistic.**
    Change won’t happen overnight. “It’s a lifestyle change, so stay patient,” assures Pitt, who offers free workouts for minorities in Kinston. Plan a workout schedule that fits your life and try not to schedule other things during that time. Look at exercise as something positive and fun, not just another task to check off your list. “You’re more likely to do something that you really like,” says Coley, “so be sure to choose an activity that you actually enjoy.”
Few people are unaware of heart disease and its potentially devastating effects. But many people may not known that the term “heart disease” is a blanket term used to describe several health problems related to the heart.

According to the World Health Organization, ischaemic heart disease, which is characterized by a reduced blood supply to the heart, is the leading cause of death across the globe. Though many conditions are characterized as ischaemic heart disease, many others are not, and the WHO notes that other heart conditions, including stroke, are also among the top 10 most deadly diseases in the world. The following is a rundown of some of the more common heart conditions, many of which can be prevented if men and women make the right lifestyle choices.

- **ANGINA**
  Angina occurs when a person has chest pain or discomfort around their heart because the muscle is not getting enough oxygen-rich blood. Angina can be a byproduct of elevated levels of stress or overexertion and may even be caused by clogged arteries. All cases of angina are not the same. Stable angina is the most common form, and usually follows a pattern that is common among patients. Unstable angina is less predictable, while variant angina, the rarest form of the condition, occurs while a person is at rest. Rest and medicine are at the root of treating angina, which is more easily treated once its cause has been determined.

- **ATHEROSCLEROSIS**
  Atherosclerosis is characterized by the buildup of fatty materials in the arterial walls. This fatty material can harden over time, restricting blood flow and resulting in calcium deposits. Daily exercise and a healthy diet void of high-fat, high-cholesterol foods are two ways to prevent or treat atherosclerosis.

- **CARDIAC ARREST**
  Cardiac arrest is a culmination of several heart conditions, including angina and atherosclerosis. Also known as a heart attack, cardiac arrest occurs when blood and oxygen are unable to reach the heart. Chest discomfort; discomfort in other areas of the upper body, including the arms, back, neck or jaw; shortness of breath with or without chest discomfort; and nausea or lightheadedness may all be indicators that a person is going into cardiac arrest.

- **HYPERTENSION**
  Also known as high blood pressure, hypertension is a relatively common heart condition. Nearly every adult has likely received a blood pressure reading at one point in his life. That reading measures the systolic pressure, which is the pressure created when the heart beats, and the diastolic pressure, which is the pressure in the heart when it is at rest. A blood pressure above 120 over 80 is considered high, and that high figure might be caused by salt and water levels in the body and the condition of the body’s kidneys, nervous system and blood vessels, as well as the body’s hormone levels. Treating hypertension is relatively simple, as a doctor will typically recommend some dietary changes and may even prescribe medication for those patients with especially high blood pressure.

- **STROKE**
  Stroke occurs when the blood supply to any part of the brain is interrupted. Potentially deadly, stroke can cause paralysis as well. Trouble speaking, loss of coordination and trouble moving limbs may be indicative of stroke, which is considered a medical emergency that requires immediate medical help. The longer a person goes between the onset of a stroke and seeking treatment often determines the severity of the consequences.

Source: www.heart.org

Daily exercise is one way men and women can prevent the onset of heart disease.

Many heart conditions can be prevented if the right lifestyle choices are made.
Recently, Onslow Memorial Hospital has extended its commitment to cardiovascular care excellence with two important designations: The Get With The Guidelines®– Heart Failure Gold Quality Achievement Award from the American Heart Association, and earning The Joint Commission’s Advanced Certification for our Primary Stroke Center, a distinction held by only a handful of hospitals east of I-95. These quality milestones are more examples of how we are reaching on and learning on … so our patients can live on. Learn more about these exciting designations inside this special section.