

“Wise for Life.” Getting to the Heart of the Matter

You may have heard these statistics before:

- **Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. and a primary contributor to many long-term disabilities.**
- **Heart disease leads to more deaths in women than men each year, and women are more likely than men to die within a year of an initial heart attack.**

The very thought of suffering a heart attack or stroke may cause your blood pressure to rise a few digits, but there are more pronounced and—thankfully—preventable risk factors associated with cardiac health that everyone should take to heart. Eliminating smoking, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy weight, controlling blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and pursuing early diagnosis and treatment all are great ways to keep our hearts in tune and beating strong. In fact, some research indicates that these key preventive measures could add up to 10 years to our lives.

The El Paso County Health Department has embraced heart health education and early cardiovascular disease intervention through its newly adopted “Wise for Life” women’s wellness program. *Wise for Life* is an evidence-based, grant-funded resource and referral program for women ages 40-64, who are uninsured or underinsured and meet income eligibility requirements. The primary mission of *Wise for Life* is to equip women with the knowledge, skills and resources to improve their diet, physical activity and other healthy lifestyle choices with the ultimate goal of preventing, delaying or managing cardiovascular and other chronic diseases.

Women who participate in *Wise for Life* benefit from comprehensive health screenings, risk assessments and education from clinical staff, along with individual case management by a registered nurse during the 1st and 6th months of program participation. Initial health screenings, which are free to enrolled clients, include body mass index (BMI), cholesterol, triglyceride and blood glucose measurements. Additionally, program participants are counseled on personal life choices that promote healthy lives, such as regular physical activity, good nutrition habits and a smoke-free environment. Well woman exams also may be available to address other health concerns, such as breast and cervical cancer.

Each woman enrolled in *Wise for Life* receives a customized wellness plan based upon their unique circumstances and relevant risk factors. These plans are created jointly between clients and program staff and set attainable goals related to diet, exercise and other lifestyle choices that greatly influence heart health, translating to healthier lives. *Wise for Life* participants with concerning cardiovascular and chronic disease indicators are referred to appropriate medical providers in the community for additional evaluations and follow-up care, as needed.

Although February is the month we traditionally focus on heart health, preventing heart disease is a year-round concern with possible life-and-death consequences. On behalf of the El Paso County Health Department, I strongly urge everyone in our community to take good care of your heart—for yourselves, your family and everyone else in your life. You can begin by visiting our website at www.elpasocountyhealth.org or calling 578-3111 to learn more about the Health Department’s “Wise for Life” program.

Additional Heart Disease Facts

- Nearly 50% of the U.S. adult population, age 20 and older, has total cholesterol levels of 200 mg/dL or higher—the Healthy People 2010 goal being less than 200 mg/dL. A 10% decrease in total cholesterol levels could result in an estimated 30% reduction in the incidence of coronary heart disease.
- One in three U.S. adults has high blood pressure—accounting for over 70% of initial heart attacks, strokes and heart failures.
- In 2008, cardiovascular disease cost Americans an estimated \$448 billion in medical expenses and lost work production.
- An estimated 47% of cardiac deaths in the U.S. occur before emergency services can be rendered.
- More than 63,000 women nationwide have been screened for heart disease and stroke since 2000 through the *Wise for Life* program.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Heart Association

Common Heart Attack Symptoms in Women

- Discomfort in neck, jaw, shoulder, or upper back
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea or vomiting
- Abdominal pain or “heartburn”
- Sweating
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Unusual or unexplained fatigue

Source: Colorado Springs Business Journal Health Quarterly, Spring 2009 Issue