

GUMC HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE FEBRUARY 2026

February is American Heart Awareness Month

February is known as American Heart Month, and it's a time designed to raise awareness about cardiovascular health. It's an important subject to observe because heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the U.S., and a person dies from this disease every 36 seconds. That results in almost 700,000 people dying from heart disease in the country, which accounts for 1 in every 4 deaths. While genetics might play a role in these deaths, lifestyle is a contributing factor that Americans can control to improve their health and lower their risk of a major heart attack.

Heart Disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. The term "heart disease" refers to several types of heart conditions. The most common type of heart disease in the United States is coronary artery disease (CAD). CAD affects the blood flow to the heart. Decreased blood flow can cause a heart attack.

Symptoms - Sometimes heart disease may be "silent" and not diagnosed until a person experiences signs or symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, or an arrhythmia. When these events happen, symptoms may include:

- Heart attack: Chest pain or discomfort, upper back or neck pain, heartburn, nausea or vomiting, extreme fatigue, dizziness, and shortness of breath.
- Arrhythmia: Fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations).
- Heart failure: Shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling of the feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, or neck veins.

Risk Factors - High blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and smoking are key risk factors for heart disease. About half of people in the United States (47%) have at least one of these three risk factors. Several other medical conditions and lifestyle choices can also put people at a higher risk for heart disease, including Diabetes, Overweight and obesity, Unhealthy diet, Physical inactivity, and Excessive alcohol use.

Heart Attack Warning Signs:

- Chest discomfort - Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and come back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body - Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath - This feeling can occur with or without chest discomfort.
- As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are somewhat more likely to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Learn the signs, but remember this even if you're not sure it's a heart attack, have it checked out. Minutes matter! Fast action can save lives - maybe your own. Don't wait, call 9-1-1 or your emergency response number.

Treatment and Recovery - Cardiac rehabilitation is an important program for anyone recovering from a heart attack. This can also include heart failure, or some types of heart surgery. Cardiac rehabilitation is a supervised program that includes: physical activity, education about healthy eating, and taking medicine as prescribed.

Ways To Help Quit Smoking -Seek counseling to find ways to relieve stress and improve mental health. A team of people may help you through cardiac rehabilitation. This may include your health care team, exercise and nutrition specialists, physical therapists, and counselors or mental health professionals.

ABCS of Heart Health - Every year, Americans suffer more than 1.5 million heart attacks and strokes. The good news is that you can help reduce your risk and improve your heart health by following the ABCS!

A: Take **aspirin** as directed by your health care professional. Ask your health care professional if aspirin can reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. (**SEE SIDE BAR)

B: Control your **blood pressure**. Blood pressure measures the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries. If your blood pressure stays high for a long time, you may suffer from high blood pressure (also called hypertension). High blood pressure increases your risk for heart attack or stroke more than any other risk factor.

C: Manage your **cholesterol**. Cholesterol is a waxy substance produced by the liver and found in certain foods. Your body needs cholesterol, but when you have too much, it can build up in your arteries and cause heart disease. There are different types of cholesterol: One type is “good” and can protect you from heart disease, but another type is “bad” and can increase your risk.

S: Don’t smoke. **Smoking** raises your blood pressure, which increases your risk for heart attack and stroke. If you smoke, **quit**. Talk with your health care professional about ways to help you stick with your decision. It’s never too late to quit smoking.

****SIDE BAR: Stroke warning signs:**

- Face Drooping - Does one side of the face droop or is it numb? Ask the person to smile.
- Arm weakness - Is one arm weak or numb? Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?
- Speech difficulty - is speech slurred, are they unable to speak, or are they hard to understand? Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence like “the sky is blue.” Is the sentence repeated correctly?

Time to call 9-1-1 if the person shows any of these symptoms. Even if the symptoms go away, call 9-1-1 and get them to the hospital immediately.

For more information contact:

#AmericanHeartMonth

www.CDC.gov

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