Heart Smart

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For Dorothy, fast action was a lifesaver

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Split-Second Decision

Getting to the ED when symptoms struck was a wise move

Dorothy Moore was in the car heading to a meeting when everything suddenly went black. She was conscious, but temporarily lost her vision and all feeling in her right leg. Sensing something was terribly wrong, Moore asked her friend who was driving to take her to Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas, which was just minutes away.

The moment she reached the emergency department (ED), Moore collapsed. Fortunately, the staff was by her side and immediately began checking her out and running tests, including a CT scan.

Moore was diagnosed with an aortic dissection. This happens when the inner layer of the aorta—the major artery that carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body—splits open.

“We see a problem like this about once a week,” says Baron L. Hamman, M.D., a cardiac surgeon and chairman of cardiothoracic surgery at Baylor Dallas, who is also on the medical staff at Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital. “It causes poor blood supply, which can affect any organ in the body.”

In addition to those Moore experienced, symptoms of an aortic dissection can include severe back or chest pain. These are signs of a medical emergency, so Moore was smart to head straight to the ED.

According to Dr. Hamman, high blood pressure is the most common cause of aortic dissection. Moore had been in a car accident a few months before going to Baylor Dallas, which may have aggravated her condition.

Moore underwent emergency surgery to repair her aorta. In most cases, the diseased part of the aorta is removed and replaced with a tube graft. In other cases, a stent can be inserted to improve blood flow.

“I’m so grateful they could get me into surgery so quickly,” says Moore, a resident of Denton who recently celebrated her 51st wedding anniversary. “And just a few months later I had my strength back and everything is working like it should.”

Get Smart

People with high blood pressure or heart disease are at risk for an aortic dissection. For a referral to a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital or Baylor Dallas, call 1-800-4BAYLOR or visit FindDrRight.com.
Double Take

Heart disease and diabetes can go hand in hand

There’s an undeniable connection between heart disease and diabetes. In fact, just over half of the patients admitted to Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital also have diabetes, says Paul St. Laurent, R.N., MSN, an acute care nurse practitioner there.

“The risk factors that lead to heart and vascular disease can also lead to diabetes,” he says.

What’s more, high blood sugar can damage the inner lining of the arteries. Over time, that causes plaque to develop, which can lead to circulation problems throughout the body—including the heart.

The good news is that both heart disease and diabetes can be prevented and managed to minimize complications. And because they have many of the same risk factors, such as obesity and high blood pressure, one set of healthy choices does double duty.

Congestive heart failure (CHF) sounds serious, and it is. But it can be managed if you take action in its earliest stages. What’s more, CHF can be prevented.

Broadly defined, CHF means the heart doesn’t function appropriately for the body’s needs. CHF is most common in people with a heart weakened by heart attack, coronary artery disease, heart valve disease and other heart conditions, explains Shelley Hall, M.D., medical director, cardiac transplant, LVAD and congestive heart failure programs at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas, who is also on the medical staff at Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital.

In women, CHF can also be caused by a rare condition called postpartum cardiomyopathy, which is heart failure that occurs in the final stages of pregnancy or within about six months after giving birth.

TAKE NOTICE

Regardless of the cause, CHF is accompanied by a classic set of symptoms: shortness of breath with exertion or when lying down, and swelling in the legs, feet or belly. In its earliest stages, CHF can cause vague symptoms such as tiring easily or waking up from sleep with unexplained restlessness.

The controllable risk factors for CHF are the same as those for heart disease, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity and inactivity. Eliminating those risk factors can greatly reduce your risk of developing CHF, Dr. Hall says.

“Heart failure is a scary term,” Dr. Hall says. “But we have many excellent medical treatments to offer today. The key is being properly diagnosed—as early as possible—and getting the right treatments that can help you live a normal life.”

Give Your Heart Some TLC

If you’re at risk for or have symptoms of heart disease or CHF, talk to your doctor. For a referral to a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital or Baylor Dallas, call 1-800-4BAYLOR or visit FindDrRight.com

Don’t Fail Your Heart

Being good to yourself can keep CHF from slowing you down

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Visit us at BaylorHealth.com January 2011 / Heart Smart
From the Heart

Take care of yourself—and your ticker

Women are known for being caregivers at home and hardworking contributors on the job. Just don’t overlook your own health while taking care of everyone else.

Many of the risk factors for heart disease, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, don’t cause symptoms. And some women say they don’t have time to be sick, so they ignore symptoms like extreme fatigue—which could be a warning sign of heart disease or diabetes.

“Women with diabetes are at extremely high risk for developing heart and vascular disease,” says Paul Aggarwal, M.D., a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital and Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas.

TRIM DOWN YOUR RISKS
Regular screenings can diagnose conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol before they get out of hand. “Just lowering blood pressure can really reduce your risk for heart disease,” Dr. Aggarwal says.

So can leading a healthy lifestyle, which includes exercising two to three hours per week, keeping your weight appropriate for your height and not smoking. Consider regular checkups and healthy lifestyle choices something good you do for yourself—especially if you have a family history of heart disease. Your heart and your overall health will thank you for it.

Food for Thought

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FEED YOUR HEART WITH FISH
Researchers have weighed the evidence, and the scales are tipped in favor of omega-3 fatty acids as a nutrient that’s especially heart-healthy.

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), omega-3 fatty acids are essential polyunsaturated fats that are good for the hearts of healthy people and those who have heart disease or are at risk. The nutrient can decrease the risk of arrhythmias, which are abnormal heartbeats, and may slow the formation of plaque in the arteries. Omega 3s can also reduce levels of triglycerides and slightly reduce blood pressure.

It’s best to get your omega-3 fatty acid intake through food, which is why the AHA recommends eating fish, especially fatty fish, at least two times a week. A serving of fish is 3.5 ounces and choices high in omega 3s include salmon, mackerel, herring, lake trout, sardines and albacore tuna. Women who are pregnant or nursing should avoid shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish, and limit their intake of albacore tuna. Alternative sources of omega-3 fatty acids include tofu and other forms of soybeans as well as canola, walnuts, flaxseeds and their oils.

If you have heart disease or need to lower your triglycerides, consuming higher amounts of omega-3 fatty acids may be helpful. Another source of the nutrient is fish oil capsules, but check with your doctor about how much to take.

Treat Yourself Right

To find a physician on the medical staff at Baylor Dallas or Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital, call 1-800-4BAYLOR or visit FindDrRight.com.

JOIN US FOR FOR WOMEN FOR LIFE™
Take care of your health, inside and out, at Baylor University Medical Center and Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital’s annual women’s health event, For Women For Life™
You’ll find:
• Free screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose and body composition
• Education to stay on top of disease prevention
• Five-minute chair massages
• A light breakfast
• Health presentations by physicians and health professionals
There is no charge for admission, so get your girlfriends together and register today!
WHEN: Saturday, Jan. 22, 7:30 a.m. to noon
WHERE: Hotel Palomar, 5300 E. Mockingbird Lane, Dallas, Texas 75206
Complimentary valet parking at the front entrance
Register today by calling 1-800-4BAYLOR or learn more at BaylorHealth.com/FwFL

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