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What You Can Do To Keep Your Heart Healthy and Lessen Your Risk For Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)

Howell, Michigan, February 1, 2008 - Livingston County Department of Public Health (LCDPH) has designated February as Healthy Hearts Month.

“Heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are the number one killer in Livingston County and the state of Michigan,” said Dr. Donald Lawrenchuk, Medical Director. “In fact, CVD has been the number one cause of death nationally every year since 1900, except in 1918 – the year of the devastating flu epidemic.”

In Livingston County, heart disease and stroke killed 337 people in 2006. Three out of every 10 deaths in Livingston County is due to CVD.

“Your actions today can help prevent, delay, or minimize the effects of heart disease,” said Dr. Lawrenchuk. “The key strategy is controlling your risk factors.”

Here are steps people can take to lower their risk for heart disease and heart attack:

1) Prevent and control high blood cholesterol

High blood cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease. Preventing and treating high blood cholesterol includes eating a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in fiber, keeping a healthy weight, and getting regular exercise. All adults should have their cholesterol levels checked once every five years. If yours is high, your doctor may prescribe medicines to help lower it.

2) Prevent and control high blood pressure

Healthy lifestyle behaviors such as regular physical activity, a healthy diet, not smoking, and a healthy weight will help you maintain normal blood pressure levels. In addition, all adults should have their blood pressure checked on a regular basis. If your blood pressure is high, you can work with your doctor to treat it and bring it down to the normal range. A high blood pressure can usually be controlled with lifestyle changes and with medicines when needed.

3) Prevent and control diabetes

People with diabetes have an increased risk of heart disease. People with heart disease can take steps to reduce their risk for diabetes in the first place, through weight loss and regular physical activity.

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4) No tobacco

Smoking increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. Remaining smoke-free is one of the best things a person can do. Quitting smoking will also help lower a person's risk of heart disease. A person's risk of heart attack decreases soon after quitting.

5) Moderate alcohol use

Excessive alcohol use increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. People who drink alcohol should do so only in moderation and always responsibly.

6) Maintain a healthy weight

Healthy weight status in adults is usually assessed by using weight and height to compute a number called the "body mass index" (BMI). BMI usually indicates the amount of body fat. An adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese. Overweight is a BMI between 25 and 29.9. Normal weight is a BMI of 18 to 24.9. Proper diet and regular physical activity can help to maintain a healthy weight. To compute your BMI, please visit http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/adult_BMI/english_bmi_calculator/bmi_calculator.htm

7) Regular physical activity

Adults should engage in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week.

8) Diet and nutrition

Along with healthy weight and regular physical activity, an overall healthy diet can help to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels and prevent obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. This includes eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, lowering or cutting out added salt or sodium, and eating less saturated fat and cholesterol to lower these risks. Follow the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet, which includes lots of fruits and vegetables, limited salt, low fat dairy products, low cholesterol, low saturated fats, and good intake of calcium, potassium, and magnesium. For more information about DASH, <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/hbp/dash/introduction.html>

For more information about keeping your heart healthy, please contact 517-546-9850, or go to: www.lchd.org, www.michigan.gov/cvh, www.americanheart.org, www.cdc.gov/heartdisease, or www.nhlbi.org.