

**Splurge** - Volume 7 Issue 2 (February 2012)

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## **THE HEART OF THINGS**

It's February, the month of the heart, and a fine time to revisit the basics of heart health. Each person is unique, but there are definitely common data we all need to know about our health. Let's go over a few of the basics:

### **Family history**

Many disorders and diseases can have origins and predispositions in our genetic make-up. One thing researchers have found is that as much as we may inherit from our parents, it's actually quite helpful to pay attention to our siblings' health as well. In truth, we are genetically closer to our siblings, so the baselines may be similar.

Be sure to keep in mind different diseases or surgeries your elders experienced. For example, did anyone have a heart attack? Breast cancer? If so, at what age? These data give your doctor a broader view of how to look at your personal history, and give a clue for things to come. Your physician acts in part like an investigator, and the more clues the better.

### **Lifestyle and Personal History**

Did you have scarlet fever as a child? Were you a heavy smoker for a part of your life, or obese for any length of time? These are just a few aspects of your personal history that can affect the way a physician looks at your health, especially your heart function. Be sure to keep in mind not only your current lifestyle habits and symptoms, but also the narrative of your past. The more comprehensive the information is that you're able to share with your doctor, the more capable he or she is to help you manage your health.

### **Diet and Nutrition**

I can easily come up with a few reasons for being mindful of your diet. The first is weight management. Not only does a person feel better at a healthy weight, but they are also more likely to provide stability for the organ systems and metabolism. When a person's weight fluctuates up and down wildly, it may create stress for the heart. This is why physicians advocate steady weight loss with exercise for most patients.

Another reason for diet mindfulness is that many people, even those at a reasonable weight, fail to provide their bodies with adequate nutrition. For example, if you ingest 1200 calories a day (advantageous for many women), but it's 1200 calories worth of lattes and candy bars, you are throwing your metabolic system completely out of whack. I suggest speaking to your physician about your diet, as they may make specific suggestions for you.

### **Blood Pressure and Cholesterol**

Two simple yet crucial diagnostic measures are blood pressures and a cholesterol count. Blood pressure is easily figured by a nurse, physician, and should ideally include a count while standing and sitting. For those with elevated pressure or with other symptoms of cardiovascular risk, I also advocate checking the pressure in the extremities and the neck arteries. Studies have shown that cardiovascular disease can lead to heart attacks, but also to strokes and disease in the arms, legs, and kidneys. It's critical to be informed as much as possible to reduce risk and relieve symptoms.

As with blood pressure, your physician can learn a lot by monitoring your cholesterol. Again, if a person has high cholesterol, it may be an indication of cardiovascular disease lurking in the body, so it's important to assess the numbers. Some people have a genetic predisposition to high cholesterol levels; some have lifestyles that increase their risk. Either way, doctors have more technology to help patients reduce risk than ever before.

These are just a few basics; in the coming months, we'll talk about smoking cessation, exercise and stress reduction, lifestyle habits, and more ways to live every day healthfully and happily. Take care of yourself, and remember to always take your health to heart.

Listen to Dr. Galichia's Radio Show – "Take Your Health to Heart" every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to **GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com**. We would love to hear from you!!!

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