



Heart Smart
By Coach Stacy Fowler, M.S., C.P.T.

What is the size of a fist, weighs as much as your sneaker, works like a car engine and works day and night, even when you sleep? You're smart – it's the heart. But are you heart smart?

While Colorado is tied with Washington, D.C. for having the lowest prevalence of heart disease in the nation, cardiovascular disease is still the leading cause of death in the state. One Coloradan dies every hour due to heart disease, but nationally, the statistics paint a far more tragic picture:

- Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the U.S.
- One hundred people die every hour due to heart disease
- \$403 billion were spent in 2006 combating the disease; loss of productivity due to heart disease cost the nation \$146 billion
- Medicare hospitalizations due to the disease cost \$30 billion in 2002
- 66% of victims never fully recover
- 90% of middle-aged Americans will develop high blood pressure
- 70% of Americans are not even aware they have heart disease
- Cardiovascular disease kills more women than men each year

February is American Heart Month. Unfortunately, most women are not aware that heart attack, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases kill more women than breast cancer every year. *Go Red for Women* (www.goredforwomen.org) is the American Heart Association's nationwide movement that celebrates the energy, passion and power in women banding together to wipe out heart disease.

The red flags for cardiovascular disease are well known: tobacco use, poor food diet, excessive alcohol intake, physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, high blood pressure and cholesterol. Certain risk factors cannot be controlled:

- Age – the risk of heart disease increases with age
- Gender – women's risk of heart disease rises sharply after menopause and more women than men suffer strokes
- Heredity – genetic risk can play a role in heart disease

So how do we win the battle against heart disease? Prevention, prevention, prevention! Here are some "heart smart" tips for avoiding the risk of cardiovascular disease:

- Move It! Try to build up to 10,000 steps each day.

- Make healthy food choices. Eat plenty of colors (fruits and vegetables) and limit your intake of saturated fats and salt.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Schedule yearly checkups.
- Keep your cholesterol, blood pressure and sugar levels in check.
- Avoid tobacco in all forms and excessive use of alcohol.
- Take time to recharge yourself and try to keep stress levels in check.

The warning signs of a heart attack vary widely, from sudden and intense to generally not feeling well. Symptoms can include:

- Chest discomfort
- Pain in other areas of the body, such as the back, arms, neck, jaw or stomach
- Shortness of breath
- Cold sweat, nausea, and dizziness

Call 911 immediately if you or someone you are with suffers any of these symptoms.

The Colorado Clinical Guidelines Collaborative (CCGC) is a nonprofit organization that includes doctors, health insurers, hospitals, and businesses. The organization is working together to develop prevention guidelines (based on the original Framingham Assessment) to help Coloradans reduce their risk for heart attack and stroke. The CCGC partnered with several other community health organizations to develop a simple, comprehensive tool to help physicians screen and manage patients at increased risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke. The guidelines focus on assessing a patient's risk for developing cardiovascular disease. You can take this assessment online at www.coloradoguidelines.org.

But here's a heads up before you do. We all know our numbers – phone numbers, social security numbers, license plate numbers. But in order to take charge of your health, you need to know these important numbers like the back of your hand:

- Blood pressure
- HDL levels
- Total cholesterol
- Age (not how old you want to be)

I've got your number. And you never know – the life you save by reading this could be your own.