



## Heart Smart

Heart Disease is the #1 cause of death in Berrien County, the State of Michigan and the United States. This is probably no surprise to you. However, you may be surprised that you can do many things to reduce your risk for heart disease.

**Know the risk factors:** There are risk factors that you can not control, like heredity, age, and gender. However, there are also risk factors that you CAN control to reduce your risk for heart disease, including high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, overweight/inactivity and diabetes. Other factors that can affect your risk for heart disease include your response to stress, excessive alcohol intake and the use of illegal drugs.

**High Blood Pressure** – High blood pressure makes the heart work harder than normal, which makes both the heart and arteries more prone to injury. High blood pressure raises the risk of heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure, eye damage, congestive heart failure and fatty buildups of plaque in the arteries. High blood pressure (called the “silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms) is usually behind many heart attacks.



pressure in the arteries while the heart is beating. The lower (second) number is the pressure

recorded as two numbers such as 120/78. The first number is the pressure

when the heart is resting between beats. To see if your numbers are too high, check with a health care professional.

**Tobacco Smoking** is the single most preventable cause of death in the United States. Smokers have a higher risk of illness and death from heart attack, stroke, mouth and throat cancers, chronic lung diseases and infections, congestive heart failure and peripheral vascular disease (in the legs and arms). While you are smoking, your heart and other tissues can't get the oxygen they need. Also, the nicotine damages the inner walls of blood vessels.

**High Cholesterol**- Cholesterol is a fat-like substance found in the blood. High cholesterol can lead to buildup on the inner walls of arteries. This buildup, called plaque, narrows the arteries and reduces the blood flow. Plaques that rupture cause blood clots that can block blood flow in the artery. Clots also can break off and travel to another part of the body. If a clot blocks a blood vessel that feeds the heart, it causes a heart attack. High blood cholesterol has no symptoms, so it is important to have it checked by a medical professional.

**Overweight/Inactivity** If you have too much body fat – especially if a lot of it is in you waist area – you're at higher risk for health problems, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high triglycerides, diabetes, heart disease and stroke. The waist measurement and body mass index (BMI) are the recommended ways to estimate a person's body fat. A

high risk waistline is more than 35 inches for women and more than 40 inches for men. BMI, as calculated using height and weight, should be 25 or under. Ask your health care professional what your BMI is.

**Diabetes** – If you have diabetes and you are not in a controlled range on most days you have a three to seven times more risk of heart disease and heart attack. Talk to your health care provider about ways to manage your diabetes.

## Reduce Your Risk

### 1. Improve Eating Habits:

- Reduce sodium. Take the salt shaker off the table. Season your foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.
- Buy fruits and vegetable for snacks.
- Choose lean cuts of meat, fish, and poultry.
- Choose lower fat, lower calorie foods.
- Drink water instead of pop or sugary juices
- Limit alcoholic beverages.

### 2. Choose to Move:

Get 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week to condition your heart and lungs. Doing things like walking, gardening, housework or dancing for at least 30 minutes on most days can help your heart. The time may be broken into shorter periods. Talk to your doctor about any restrictions that you may have.

### 3. If you Smoke . . . QUIT.

Contact BCHD for smoking cessation services and support. **927-5668**

### Berrien County Health

**Department:**  
Preventing Disease,  
Prolonging Life and  
Protecting the  
Health of the  
Community.



### Healthy Hearts Month

February is Healthy Hearts month. This month, the health department will be bringing you information on Stress and Heart Disease, Heart Smart, Generations with Promise, and Healthy Lifestyles. For questions about any of these topics, please call the health department at **926-7121**.

### Heart Attack Warning Signs:

**Chest discomfort:** Many people having heart attacks feel discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or goes away and comes back. It can feel like pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain. Some say it feels like an elephant setting on their chest. (Not everyone having a heart attack will feel chest pain.)

**Discomfort in other areas of upper body** – this can include pain in one or both arms, neck, jaw, or stomach.

**Shortness of breath** with or before the chest pain.

**Other signs** can include feeling a cold sweat, nausea, light-headedness, or passing out.

If you or someone you're with has one or more of these signs, don't wait- call 9-1-1. **Get advanced medical support (ambulance) right away. Do not drive the person yourself to seek medical care.**



**For more information about heart health, or for smoking cessation support, call BCHD at**

**926-7121**

*Special thanks to Pam Quinn for her help with this article!*

**The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:**

Benton Harbor		Niles		Three Oaks
769 Pipestone	M-139 Office	School Based	1205 N. Front St.	21 N. Elm
P.O. Box 706	2106 S. M-139	870 Colfax Ave	684-2800	756-2008
926-7121	927-5623	925-4500		

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