



Senior Care Today

From **Mount Vernon Nursing and Rehabilitation Center**

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www.mvnrc.net

Get Heart Smart... Staying heart-healthy as we age

Dear Friends,

As Administrator of Mount Vernon Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, I am well aware of the serious risk that poor heart health represents in our community. Over the years, we have cared for hundreds of seniors with heart-related problems among both our long-term resident and short-term rehabilitation patient populations.

In fact, statistics show that coronary heart disease, leading to heart attack and angina, is the single leading cause of death in America. Tragically, many of these fatalities may have been avoided.

The good news is that with early detection, regular monitoring and effective care by trained professionals—including comprehensive, personalized programs for post-hospital rehabilitation and recovery from a heart attack or heart surgery such as we have here at Mount Vernon. With proper detection and post-hospital care, many of those who are affected can continue to enjoy active, fulfilling lives once equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to manage their conditions and make important lifestyle adjustments.

It is for this reason that we are committed to raising the level of awareness for this important health issue throughout our community. As part of this effort, we are pleased to bring you the latest edition of Senior Care Today. We hope the information contained on the following pages will give you and your loved ones a better understanding of heart health and provide a few helpful hints to keep the risks of heart problems to a minimum.

In future issues, we will address other health and wellness topics and issues of importance to seniors and their families, as identified in our recently completed reader survey. We look forward to bringing this useful information to you.

Sincerely,

Betty Solomonson, RN, CNP, LNHA
Administrator

Mount Vernon Nursing & Rehabilitation Center is a locally owned and operated 130 bed skilled and intermediate nursing facility that has served the Alexandria/Mount Vernon community for over 25 years. Conveniently located between Alexandria and Mount Vernon, it is part of a medical community including physicians' offices and the Mount Vernon Hospital.

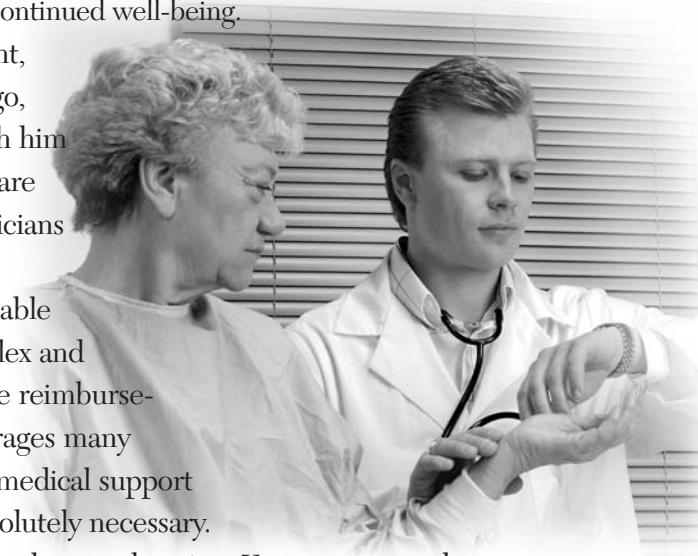
A Wellness Checkup – the best thing you can do for your heart

When was the last time you went to the doctor just for a checkup? Unfortunately, too many people over 50 have a better relationship with their local auto mechanic than they do with their own physician. It is a sad fact that as we get older we tend to avoid doctors instead of making them active partners in our continued well-being.

Some of this is a consequence of our current, more impersonal, healthcare system. Years ago, you found a doctor you trusted and stuck with him or her for life. Unfortunately, today's health care environment often limits your choice of physicians and often necessitates changes among your providers based on their participation in available health care plans. This, combined with complex and

often costly healthcare reimbursement policies, discourages many seniors from seeking medical support unless it becomes absolutely necessary.

Another factor is simple apprehension. You may worry that your doctor will find something seriously wrong, so you put off getting a checkup. However, the longer you wait, the more worrisome it becomes. Often, one might delay seeking attention until a serious symptom develops that forces the issue. Unfortunately, with heart disease, once serious symptoms appear, it is often too late to prevent permanent damage.



Aspirin... the wonder drug*

Chewing an un-coated aspirin at the first sign of chest discomfort or distress can reduce the damage to the heart muscle during a heart attack.

*Always check first with your physician in advance about the safety of taking aspirin.

Do the right thing... it can save your life!

Most physicians will tell you — when it comes to staying heart healthy, regular checkups play a vital role in identifying potential problems before they become irreversible.

Consider some of the biggest contributors to heart disease — high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, and diabetes. Not only does the risk for these “silent killers” increase dramatically as you pass middle age, you could be walking around with them for years without even knowing you have them. Yet, a simple, annual medical checkup can give you the information you need to take actions that can help prevent serious problems and add years to your life.

Remember, when it comes to your health, knowledge is power. So make it your business to find a doctor you trust and get a complete checkup at least once a year, more often if you have already been diagnosed with a health problem that requires regular monitoring.

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A heart-healthy eating plan

The National Institute of Health and most physicians recommend the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan to help lower blood pressure and combat heart disease. Rich in fruits, vegetables, low-fat or non-fat dairy, lean meats, fish, poultry, grains, nuts and beans, this diet is designed to help lower cholesterol and support healthy weight loss, and is flexible enough to meet the lifestyle and food preferences of most people.

The following guidelines are based on a 2000 calorie-per-day diet:



Relieving Stress through Meditation

If you have experienced a heart attack, been diagnosed with heart disease, or your blood pressure is dangerously high, chances are your doctor has recommended reducing stress in your daily life. Stress makes your arteries constrict and your blood clot faster, which in turn can lead to a heart attack. It also causes blockages to form in your arteries more readily and produces hormones that cause excess weight gain, another risk factor for heart disease.

Since many of us live far more complex lives than our parents did and usually lack the ability to simply “escape” to a stress-free environment, we need to be able to find ways to calm ourselves down and manage our anxieties before they do us harm.

The High Cost of Heart Attack

Estimates are that the costs related to heart attack exceed \$60 billion each year.

Meditation is one powerful means of reducing stress and taking a physical, mental and emotional break from the pressures around you. In most forms of meditation, you repeat

a sound, or a phrase, or a verse from a favorite prayer, over and over again. The sound can be repeated out loud or silently, although many people find that concentration is easier when you say it out loud. Another way to meditate is to simply concentrate on your breathing: in and out, over and over. The point is to quiet your mind and totally relax your body.

Once you're able to focus your mind, you can try playing with guided imagery. Like a mini vacation without the expense, this exercise allows you to mentally go to your favorite places—a tropical beach, the top of a snow-covered mountain, a country meadow—any place you find relaxing, and use all your senses to imagine you are actually there.

It does not matter how long you meditate, only that you do it on a regular basis. Even a minute of meditation has benefits that can last an entire day. So turn off the phone, draw the blinds, find a comfortable position and begin. Your heart and soul will thank you. *Ally*

A HEART HEALTHY EATING PLAN

FOOD GROUP	NUMBER OF SERVINGS	SERVING SIZE
Grains & Grain Products	7 to 8 per day	1 slice of bread, 1/2 cup dry cereal, cooked rice, or pasta
Vegetables	4 to 5 per day	1/2 cup raw non-leafy 3/4 cup cooked
Fruits & Juice	4 to 5 per day	3/4 cup fruit juice 1 medium fruit 1/2 cup fresh, frozen or canned 1/4 cup dried
Dairy (low-fat or fat-free)	2 to 3 per day	1 cup fat free or 1% milk 1 cup low-fat yogurt 1-1/2 oz. non-fat cheese
Meat, Poultry & Fish	2 or less per day	3 oz. broiled or roasted lean meats, skinless poultry or seafood
Nuts, Seeds & Beans	4 to 5 per week	1/2 cup cooked beans 1/4 cup nuts 2 tbs. sunflower seeds
Fats, Oils & Salad Dressings	2 to 3 per day	1 tsp. oil, regular mayo or soft margarine 1 tbs. low-fat mayo or 2 tbs. light salad dressing
Snacks & Sweets	5 per week	1 medium fruit 1 cup low-fat yogurt 1/2 cup low-fat frozen yogurt 3/4 cup pretzels 1 tbs. sugar, jelly, jam, maple syrup 3 pieces hard candy

Keep this handy chart on your refrigerator for heart-healthy eating.

Do you Really know the Symptoms of a Heart Attack?

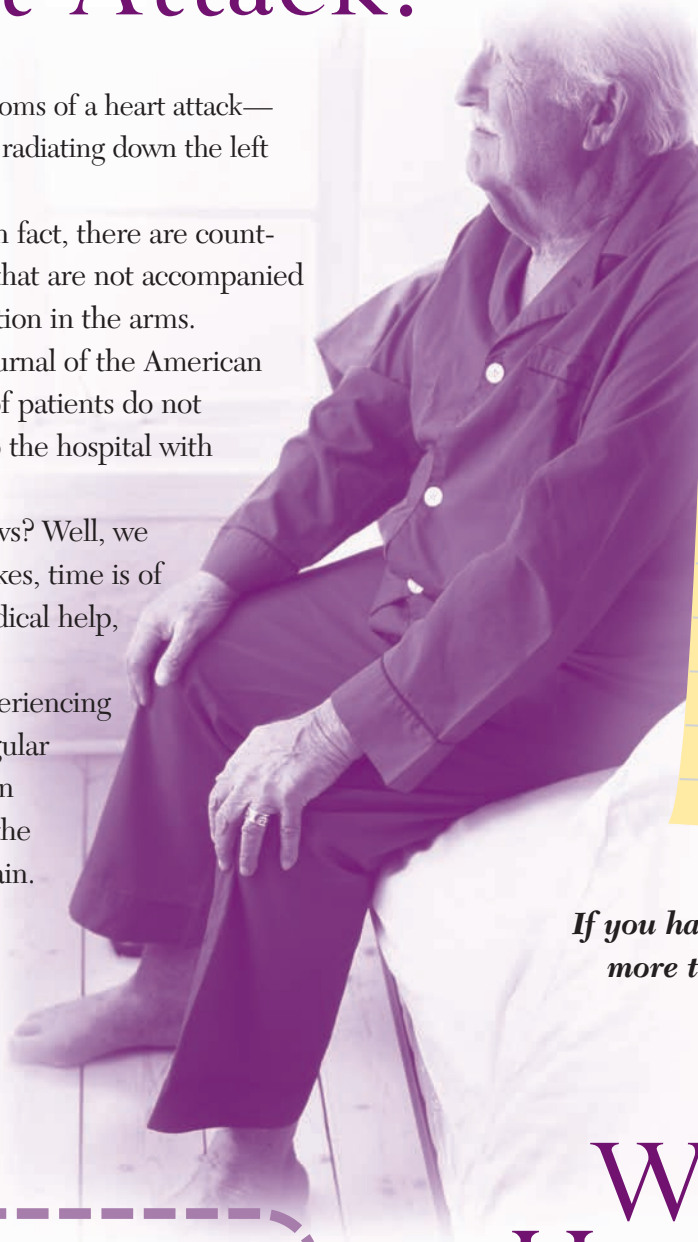
We all think we know the symptoms of a heart attack—the crushing chest pain, often radiating down the left arm. Right?

The answer is a distinct “maybe.” In fact, there are countless cases of heart attacks every year that are not accompanied by any noticeable chest pain or sensation in the arms. According to a recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association, fully one-third of patients do not exhibit chest pain when presenting to the hospital with a heart attack.

What is so important about this news? Well, we all know that when a heart attack strikes, time is of the essence. The quicker you get medical help, the better your prognosis.

So, if you are not feeling well—experiencing sweating, overwhelming nausea, irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, or even fainting—do not wait until you have the “classic” symptoms of chest or arm pain.

Call 911 immediately. *My*



Heart Attack Symptoms at a Glance

- Discomfort, pressure, heaviness, or pain in the chest, arm or below the breastbone
- Discomfort radiating to the back, jaw, throat or arm
- A feeling of fullness, indigestion or choking (may feel like heartburn)
- Sweating, nausea, vomiting or dizziness
- Extreme weakness, anxiety or shortness of breath
- Rapid or irregular heartbeats

If you have any combination of these symptoms for a period of more than a few minutes, do not wait, call 911 immediately!

The best ways to avoid heart problems:

- Find a doctor you trust
- Schedule annual wellness checks
- Keep your appointments, even if you feel great
- Always make your next appointment before leaving the office and ask the scheduler to call and remind you
- Follow your doctor’s advice, and if you are skeptical, get a second opinion

Flossing... Good for your Heart?

According to the American Academy of Periodontology, people with periodontal disease are almost twice as likely to have clogged arteries. One study found that the presence of common problems in the mouth, including gum disease (gingivitis), cavities, and missing teeth were as good at predicting heart disease as cholesterol levels. Although the reasons are still unclear, there appears to be a link between the plaque that forms on our teeth and the plaque inside our arteries. This is just one more reason to practice good dental hygiene every day.



Women Have Heart Attacks Too

Many people do not realize that heart disease is as common in women as in men. In fact, heart and blood vessel diseases kill more women than all other diseases combined.

It is true that the naturally produced hormone, estrogen, gives women a natural form of heart protection that lasts up until menopause. Thus, women were typically considered to have a far lower risk of heart disease. However, studies show that once that natural estrogen buffer is gone, usually around age 50, a woman’s risk of developing heart disease catches up to men’s fairly rapidly. Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) may delay the increased risk, but recent links between HRT and various forms of cancer put the value of this approach in question. Consequently, post-menopausal women need to be as vigilant as men about regular checkups, smart lifestyle choices and recognizing subtle changes in their health.



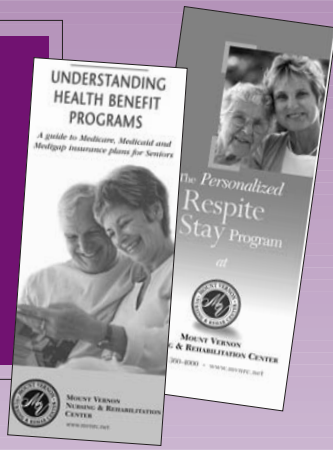
Dance your way to a more healthy heart

Want a fun and effective way to lower your risk of heart disease or to help keep existing heart problems in check? Why not try dancing?

There is no question that regular exercise is a key to optimum heart health... at virtually any age. Yet many seniors either lack the interest in or the access to a conventional health club or exercise facility. If you are among them, you should know that recent studies have shown that slow to moderate social dancing can actually be more beneficial than traditional, gym-based exercise programs. Although both forms of exercise can boost heart health and improve breathing, dancing has the added benefit of improving quality of life. *My*

Be sure to consult your physician before starting any exercise regimen.

Helpful Free Guides for Seniors



As part of MVNRC's on-going commitment to the community, we are pleased to offer a comprehensive series of educational pamphlets of particular interest to seniors and their loved ones. The following titles are available, free for the asking. Simply complete and return the form below or call 703-360-4000. The pamphlets can also be downloaded from our web site, www.mvnrc.net.

Please send me the following Free educational pamphlets: (please check)

- High Blood Pressure
- Facts About Aging and Bone Health
- Diabetes and Older Adults
- Understanding Health Benefit Programs
- Becoming an Informed Participant in your Rehabilitation
- Understanding Geriatric Rehabilitation
- The Personalized Respite Stay Program at MVNRC
- Transitional Care
- Winter Safety for Seniors

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Clip and Mail this coupon to:

Mount Vernon Nursing & Rehabilitation Center
8111 Tis Well Drive, Alexandria, VA 22306

What can you do after a **Heart Attack or Heart Surgery** to regain your strength and return to a normal lifestyle?



If you or someone you love is hospitalized for heart attack or heart surgery you should ask about which of the area's rehab facilities offer a comprehensive post-hospital cardiac rehab program. This should include personalized care plans that provide:

- The staffing to meet medical management needs for complex conditions (as most heart attacks often involve pre-existing conditions and other contributing factors that should be addressed).
- Complete diagnostic and treatment capabilities including:
 - EKG/Radiology/Sonography/Doppler Studies
 - Bi-Pap/C-Pap Assisted Breathing Devices
- Treatment programs that include: Physical and Occupational Therapy, Pain Management and Nutritional Counseling

Statistics Show That...

Owning and knowing how to use an automated external defibrillator (AED) has been shown to dramatically reduce the number of deaths due to cardiac arrest.

If you or a loved one needs more information about cardiac rehab programs please call our Administrator, Betty Solomonson, RN, CNP, and LNHA at 703-360-4000



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Inside:

Helpful information, guidelines and activities on the best ways to ensure heart health.

Want to receive this newsletter via e-mail?

Simply go to www.mvnrc.net and click on *Report to the Community on Senior Care Today*.