



Press Release
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Taking a Pulse on Cardiovascular Disease during American Heart Month

Heart conditions can worsen how COVID-19 affects your body.

KNOX CITY, Texas (Feb 1, 2021) – February is American Heart Month, a nationwide program designed to raise awareness of cardiovascular diseases' dangers. While COVID-19 continues to dominate headlines, Knox County Hospital District hopes to bring heart disease to the forefront of conversations – a move that can potentially save lives.

"There is no doubt that coronavirus continues to pose a major threat to our community, but that does not mean we should ignore the No. 1 killer in Texas: heart disease," says Dr. Laura Hart, physician in Knox City. "Fortunately, heart disease is detectible through tests and screenings. Knowing more about the health of your heart starts with a discussion with your primary care provider."

Heart disease is still the No. 1 cause of death in the United States and continues to be a severe health crisis. In Texas, heart disease is also the leading cause of death, accounting for more than 23 percent.

Approximately 85.6 million Americans live with some form of cardiovascular disease, including congestive heart failure, coronary heart disease, or high blood pressure. Major risk factors for cardiovascular disease, all of which are controllable to a certain degree, include high blood pressure, stress, high cholesterol, smoking, diabetes, obesity, family history, and lack of regular exercise.

In early 2020 when not much was known about the coronavirus pandemic, researchers observed that individuals with cardiovascular disease were more than twice as likely to experience severe forms of COVID-19.

There are two explanations as to how cardiovascular disease increases the risk of severe COVID-19. First, pre-existing heart conditions weaken the body's ability to survive stresses on the body brought on by coronavirus. This means that a person with a weakened heart is more likely to succumb to the effects of unstable blood pressure, fever, and low oxygen levels – all systems seen in COVID-19 patients.

Secondly, COVID-19 patients often experience poor underlying metabolic health, such as type-2 diabetes and obesity, which cause inflammation and risk of blood clots. These symptoms compound the effects of COVID-19 and increase the likelihood of critical complications of the virus.

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According to Dr. Hart, a thorough physical exam of your weight, blood pressure, and cardiovascular fitness can help identify possible complications. Individuals who may be at the highest risk for heart disease could benefit from an electrocardiogram. This test can be performed at Knox County Hospital and allows physicians to take a closer look at one's heart's performance.

Medical providers can supply individuals at high risk for heart disease with medication and resources to prevent complications. Prescribed medication, a medically directed diet, and an exercise program are the usual recommended options.

People with cardiovascular disease can strengthen their defense against future heart and coronavirus complications by adopting healthy behaviors. In fact, physically active individuals are twice as likely to avoid a heart attack if they incorporate plenty of physical activity into their lifestyle.

Exercise routines should be brisk enough to raise the heart and breathing rates and sustain them for at least 30 minutes without interruption, and they should be repeated at least three to five times per week.

For individuals who have recently experienced a cardiac episode, rehabilitation is key to regaining their strength. The cardiac rehabilitation program at Knox County Hospital provides a convenient setting with professionals who understand how these individuals feel.

Integrating education, counseling, and medical tests, the program helps individuals safely increase their physical fitness while reducing cardiac symptoms.

"For some patients, participation in a cardiac rehabilitation program can reduce heart-related deaths by as much as 30 percent," Dr. Hart explains. "It's truly amazing what the program at Knox County Hospital can do to strengthen your cardiovascular system and help reduce your chances of a relapse."

Though the cardiac rehab program is personalized for each patient, based on his or her condition, patients typically attend three sessions a week for 12 weeks. Exercise programs are performed under carefully monitored conditions to ensure that there is a safe strength progression.

According to Dr. Hart, easing into activities that do not overstimulate the heart is essential to recovery. Overexertion can cause physical harm but underperforming has the potential to prevent the body from successfully healing.

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A referral by a physician to the cardiac rehabilitation program is required. For more information about cardiovascular disease and whether the cardiopulmonary rehabilitation program may benefit you, talk with your cardiologist or primary care provider.

About Knox County Hospital District

Founded in 1926, Knox County Hospital District provides healthcare for residents of Knox County and surrounding areas. The district offers a wealth of medical services, including 24-hour emergency care, advanced radiology services, a clinical laboratory, home health, physical therapy, long-term care, patient education, and more. For additional information, please call 940-657-3535 or visit www.knoxhospital.org.

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