

FOLLOW YOUR

Heart



TO A HEALTHIER LIFE

by Marilyn Thomas



HEART AND BLOOD VESSEL DISEASE CAN BE A DEBILITATING ILLNESS, AND A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF THE POPULATION WITHIN THE NATION AND THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA SUFFERS FROM ITS DEBILITATING EFFECTS. NEVERTHELESS, AWARENESS AND ACTION ARE THE KEYS TO PREVENTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS DISEASE OR TO REVERSE ITS HARMFUL EFFECTS ONCE IT HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED.

The Library of Congress credits the heart as “the hardest working muscle” within the human body. To supply life-sustaining blood to nearly every cell, this extraordinary organ beats about 100,000 times per day and pumps around 2,500 gallons of this vital fluid at least 12,000 miles in a 24-hour period.

Because it is indispensable, maintaining a strong and healthy heart is essential to enjoying a long and happy life. Even so, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have estimated that nearly 12 percent of people within the United States have been diagnosed with heart disease, and it is the leading cause of death in the nation and in South Carolina.

The state’s Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) defines heart disease as “any affliction that impairs the structure or function of the heart.” Coronary artery disease is the most common, and Lexington Medical Center’s website describes this condition as “a narrowing or hardening of blood vessels that jeopardizes and sometimes even stops the flow of blood and oxygen to the heart.”

The latest statistics collected by DHEC claim that more than 10,000 South Carolinians succumbed to heart disease in 2015. That same year, 50,167 people across the state were hospitalized for heart-disease-related illnesses, and the associated medical costs totaled \$3.2+ billion.

South Carolina is ranked seventeenth in the nation for heart disease as the leading cause of death, according to the CDC. The American Heart Association has also con-

firmed that Southern states tend to have higher percentages of poor cardiovascular health, and South Carolina is one of eight states within the region designated as the “stroke belt.” Although some statistical improvements have been witnessed in recent years, this geographical anomaly has been documented since the 1940s. Symptoms of heart disease can vary depending upon the type of issue a person has, and men and women may even present differently. Regrettably, many are not diagnosed until a serious medical event occurs, and emergency assistance should be secured immediately if a person experiences chest pain, shortness of breath, and/or fainting.

Although age, gender, and family history may inherently increase one’s chances of having heart disease, DHEC warns that several risk factors contribute to a person’s propensity for developing poor cardiovascular health. These include:

- Smoking
- Obesity
- Lack of physical activity
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- High cholesterol

Each of these factors has an impact on the disease in different ways, but research has proven that positive lifestyle choices can greatly improve heart health. For example, quitting smoking can reverse some of the resulting damage, but remaining a nonsmoker and avoiding secondhand smoke are best. Also, eating healthy foods in appropriate portions, exercising, and coping with stress productively are powerful influences in

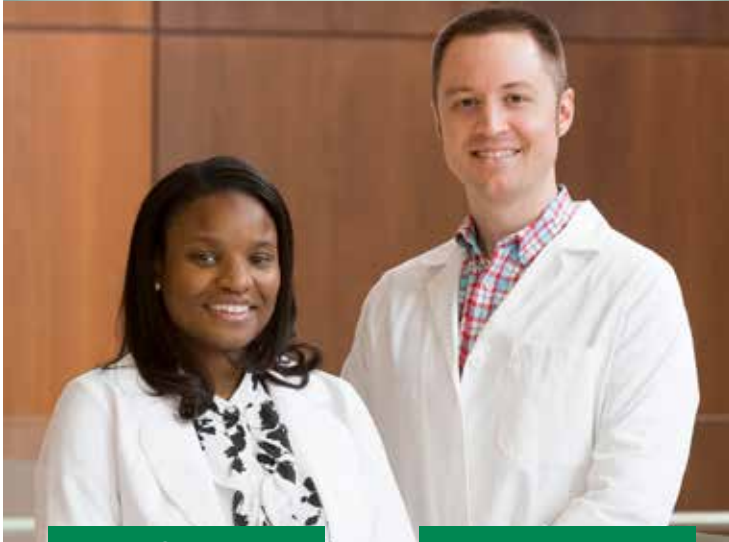
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STRIVE FOR THESE HEALTHY HEART GOALS:

- ♥ **Blood Glucose:**
< 100 (after fasting)
- ♥ **Blood Pressure:**
< 120/80
- ♥ **Body Mass Index (BMI):**
< 25
- ♥ **Daily Exercise and Relaxation:**
30 minutes+ (each)
- ♥ **Exposure to Cigarettes/
Smoke:** None
- ♥ **HDL Cholesterol:** 50+
- ♥ **LDL Cholesterol:**
<130 or <100
- ♥ **Total Cholesterol:** < 180
- ♥ **Triglycerides:** < 150
- ♥ **Waist Size:** < 40" for men
and <35" for women

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maintaining a strong heart.

Most importantly, annual checkups can help patients to regularly monitor their weight, blood glucose, cholesterol, and blood pressure, which are all critical indicators of cardiovascular health. Any concerns should be discussed with a medical doctor because potential problems can sometimes be detected early and beneficial changes can be made.

Veronica Sims is an Irmo resident who knows firsthand how quickly and seriously heart disease can change one's life. For 31 years, she worked at the Allied Chemical Fiber Division facility (aka Shaw Industries) on St. Andrews Road, but after retiring, her main occupation has become spending time with her grandchildren.

For several years, Mrs. Sims had been taking medication for type-2 diabetes, which "runs in the family," although she exercises regularly. In late 2016, however, her doctor discovered that she had an irregular heartbeat, and Mrs. Sims was completely unaware of the issue because she "never felt bad."

The following March, after contracting pneumonia and bronchitis, which weakened her heart, she made an appointment with a cardiologist at Lexington Medical Center (LMC). He performed an echocardiogram and immediately scheduled her for surgery so a defibrillator could be installed to address the problem.

As part of her recovery, Mrs. Sims was then re-



Veronica Sims, patient

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WITH THE SURGEONS, HOSPITAL,
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... THE PEOPLE ARE VERY NICE;
THEY WORK WITH YOU."**

ferred to the hospital's Cardiac Rehabilitation Program, which is located inside the Irmo Medical Park at 7033 St. Andrews Road. She welcomed their help, and, to this day, she visits the facility three times a week, where the staff assists her in monitoring her vital signs, exercising effectively and safely, and setting nutritional goals.

According to LMC's website, studies have shown that those who enter cardiac rehabilitation programs have better medical

outcomes than those who do not participate. LMC's cardiac rehabilitation program offers closely monitored exercise programs, nutrition counseling, and instructional classes on a variety of heart-health-related topics.

"I haven't had a bad experience at Lexington (Medical Center) at all," says Mrs. Sims. "I've been very pleased with the surgeons, hospital, and where I go for the therapy ... The people are very nice; they work with you."

Because of the help she has received, Mrs. Sims says her life has changed "100%," and, as an added benefit, she is no longer required to take medication for her diabetes because it is now under control. ■

Search these websites to learn more about healthy heart choices:

- ♥ Lexington Medical Center: www.lexmed.com
- ♥ The American Heart Association: www.heart.org
- ♥ The Mayo Clinic: www.mayoclinic.org
- ♥ The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: www.nhlbi.nih.gov
- ♥ The U.S. Food and Drug Administration: www.fda.gov



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