Meet Dr. Leslie Brookfield

Dr. Brookfield specializes in cardiovascular disease at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge and Advocate Medical Group in Glenview.

Dr. Brookfield chose the medical field of cardiology because it was exciting. “Back then, I liked the adrenalin that accompanied treating heart attacks and the acuteness of the illnesses that accompanied them. Now, twenty years later, I’m more interested in wellness, and I don’t need the adrenalin.”

Today Brookfield enjoys being a family practice doctor of cardiovascular disease. “Keeping people well and helping them age gracefully are the challenges I want professionally.”

How can someone stay well while aging? “It’s basic but true,” says Brookfield. “Eat healthy. You already know to avoid trans fats,” Brookfield warns, “but too much fat is too much fat, no matter what kind. If you eat too much of it, you’ll be heavy.

“Be active. Find something physical you enjoy and do it regularly. Maybe you’ll choose brisk walking. Maybe an exercise class.” She adds, “If you work out with a friend, so much the better. Be involved with others, because people with social connections simply do better in life at every age.”

Knowing your risk for heart problems and your cholesterol (particularly your LDL or “bad” cholesterol) are important in helping you avoid serious problems, too.

But if a cardiovascular emergency does occur, time is critical. A delay in treatment increases heart damage. “Time is muscle, and the heart is a muscle,” says Brookfield. “The sooner you get to the hospital and get the closed blood vessel opened the better.” Every second counts; phone 911 immediately.

February Is American Heart Month

Prayer: Merciful God, give me the will and the energy to properly care for myself. Help me begin and sustain healthy changes in my life. Amen.

Heart disease is the #1 cause of death for women. Surprisingly, more women than men die of heart disease, and it kills more women over 65 than do all cancers combined.

While the most common heart attack symptom for both sexes is pain or discomfort in the chest, it is often less severe in women. This may be because women tend to have blockages not only in their main arteries but also in their smaller arteries.

In general, women’s symptoms are more vague than men’s. Women are somewhat more likely to experience shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain. The subtlety of the symptoms may be the reason women show up in emergency rooms later – after heart damage has already occurred.

Although the traditional risk factors for coronary artery disease – high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and obesity – affect both women and men, other factors have more impact on women: smoking, mental stress and depression, and metabolic syndrome (a combination of fat around the abdomen, high blood pressure, high sugar, and high triglycerides).

Women also are more likely than men to develop a condition called broken heart syndrome. In this recently recognized heart problem, extreme emotional stress can lead to reversible heart muscle failure.

Lifestyle changes, medicines, and/or medical or surgical procedures can help reduce the risk of heart disease. Early and ongoing prevention is important. But if you think you’re having a heart attack, call for emergency medical help immediately. Do NOT drive yourself to the emergency room.