

PRESS RELEASE

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Preventing heart attack after years of inactivity and unhealthy eating

(MEADOWBROOK, PA) – It's never too late. That's the message Dr. Andrew Mustin, a cardiologist with the Cardiovascular Center at Holy Redeemer Hospital and Medical Center, often tells older patients who think they can't prevent heart problems because they have lived a lifetime full of unhealthy eating and little exercise.

"Patients in their 50s and 60s often think the damage has been done and they don't see the point in trying to live a healthy life now," says Dr. Mustin. "But no matter when you start, living a healthy lifestyle can help prevent heart disease and a heart attack — adding years to your life."

Dr. Mustin says that lifestyle habits often make it difficult for older adults to practice healthy habits. "As people age, they tend to become less active and focus more on food. That's why exercise and eating right take on an added importance later in life. Increased age and obesity are two of the major risk factors for heart disease, so it is crucial for older adults to manage what they eat and how much they eat."

Dr. Mustin recommends that older adults eat a low-fat, low-carbohydrate diet, including fish, chicken, turkey, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods.

As for fitness, Dr. Mustin says that people are never too old to exercise. "You can begin a fitness program at any age, but the key is to exercise smartly. Ease into a program only after you've gotten medical clearance from your doctor. If you're over age 50, your doctor may order medical tests to make sure you're healthy enough to start exercising. Those tests can include a cardiac stress test, an electrocardiogram, a chest x-ray and bloodwork. Once you've been cleared, your goal is to slowly work up to about 30 minutes of physical activity a day, three to five days a week."

Virginia Simon, clubhouse manager for The Villages at Pine Valley, agrees. The Villages at Pine Valley is Holy Redeemer Health System's active adult community for people age 55 and older.

"Fitness is vitally important for maintaining good health as people age," she says. "That is why The Villages' newly opened clubhouse includes a fully equipped fitness center and a swimming pool. Our close proximity to Pennypack Park also provides our residents with a wonderful environment in which to enjoy outdoor activities such as walking or biking. A good combination of low-intensity activities like walking, swimming, and yoga, and moderate-intensity activities like weight training and biking are a great way for older adults to get in shape and maintain their health."

Dr. Mustin says another key to preventing heart disease is to stop smoking. "A smoker's risk of developing heart disease is two to four times that of nonsmokers. Cigarette smoking alone is a powerful risk factor for heart disease, but when combined with other risk factors such as old age and obesity, it greatly increases the risk for heart disease and a heart attack. Today there are new, more effective medications that can help curb the urge to smoke."

Dr. Mustin adds: "The bottom line is that there are risk factors for heart disease that you can't control – such as age and family history. However, there are risk factors that you can do something about – such as eating a healthy diet, being physically active, and avoiding tobacco. Prevention is critical because many first heart attacks are fatal or disabling. The sooner you begin a healthy lifestyle, the longer and stronger your heart will beat."