

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Contact: Steve Todd, Health Officer

517-279-9561, ext. 148

Theresa Christner, Health Education/Promotion Dir.

517-279-9561, ext. 144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

When in Doubt.... Find Out! Don't be a Health Statistic this Holiday Season!

“What is that flashing red light coming up the street? Is it Rudolph?” No, it’s an ambulance. According to a study published by the American Heart Association, more people will experience heart attacks on the upcoming holidays of Christmas, Boxing Day (Dec. 26th) and New Year’s Day than at any other time during the year.

The season is ripe for heart attacks. Cold weather can cause blood vessels to constrict, thereby raising blood pressure and stressing the heart. Throw in some snow shoveling or other forms of physical exertion and you may have the recipe for a heart attack. While it’s tempting to take down the Christmas lights the day after, make sure the weather is moderate enough to do so without freezing in the process.

Stress is another factor and can increase the possibility of a heart attack for those who are already dealing with heart issues. During busy times, such as the Christmas holiday, many forget to get the rest needed or to take medications on schedule. This can be compounded by the financial pressures of gift giving and travel expenses. Spread out the holiday cheer and take it in stages. Most importantly, take time out to rest and relax a bit; remember to be giving to yourself as well as to others.

The Spirits of Christmas aren’t only part of a Charles Dickens’ tale. Heavy meals combined with larger amounts of alcohol intake can cause a heart arrhythmia which has been dubbed “Holiday Heart Syndrome”. Set limits and stick to them. While these behaviors may not be an issue for some, there are many who are going beyond what their body can handle. Enjoy the season's pleasures, but in moderation.

Signs of a heart attack include:

- uncomfortable chest pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain, burning or heaviness
- discomfort in other areas of the upper body, such as the neck, jaw, shoulder, arms, back
- shortness of breath
- sudden sweating
- nausea
- light-headedness

If you are suddenly experience any of these signs, you should:

- Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number immediately, or have someone call for you;
- Stop all activity and sit or lie down and wait for emergency medical personnel to arrive;
- If you take nitroglycerin, take your normal dosage;
- If you are experiencing chest pain, chew and swallow one adult 325 mg tablet or two 80 mg tablets of ASA (acetylsalicylic acid, commonly referred to as Aspirin). Other pain medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen do not work the same way as ASA and therefore will not help.

It has been reported that some holiday heart attacks would not result in death if people sought medical attention quickly. However, many feel they are experiencing indigestion or think they just ate too much. Taking a quick nap seems like the choice some will make rather than seeking help. That nap can sometimes be the last one.

When in doubt – find out. If you feel chest pain or other symptoms, don't delay in calling 911 for emergency help. Don't postpone investigation of unusual symptoms because you don't want to spoil the holiday celebrations.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following tips:

- Be merry: The holidays can be stressful. Schedule some 'down time' and take a daily walk.

- Be generous: Helping those less fortunate is good for the heart
- Keep moving, but don't over-exert yourself: Take time to exercise. A daily walk can be both relaxing and health enhancing. Avoid over-exerting yourself physically through activities such as heavy snow shoveling if you have known risk factors (e.g. smoking, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels) or a family history of heart disease. If the weather is too cold, stop by the mall or find an indoor place to walk and relax.
- Enjoy the season's pleasures, but in moderation. Watch what you eat and drink. Avoid excess salt, sugar, fatty foods and too much alcohol.
- Get the flu shot: The flu vaccine is always a heart-healthy choice, especially if you are over 65 or have known heart disease.
- Take a CPR class with a friend. Who knows? The life you save may be your own.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency reminds you to make everyday a holiday by enjoying healthy living. To learn more about this and other health issues visit our website at: www.bhsj.org.

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