Protect your heart from cold weather dangers

The winter wonderland isn’t always so wonderful for people with cardiovascular disease. That’s because sudden exertion can strain your heart, especially if you’re shoveling snow or trudging through snowdrifts. Cold weather can also put you at risk for medical emergencies if your body loses heat faster than you can produce heat.

February is Heart Disease Awareness Month. According to the American Heart Association’s website, heart failure causes most deaths in hypothermia, a condition in which the body temperature falls below 95 degrees Fahrenheit. The warning signs include a lack of coordination, mental confusion, slowed reactions, shivering and sleepiness.

In addition to people with cardiovascular disease, children and the elderly should be careful in cold weather. It’s always wise to wear lots of layers when spending time outdoors. And don’t forget to wear a cap or scarf. Warm weather hats help you avoid losing heat and protect your ears from frostbite. Likewise, make sure your hands and feet stay warm.

Cold weather can cause people with coronary heart disease to feel pain or discomfort in their chest. Overexertion in cold weather — such as shoveling — can increase the risk for heart attack.

The American Heart Association’s website offers these tips to protect your heart during snow removal.

• Make sure you take breaks to avoid overexertion.
• Don’t eat a heavy meal prior or soon after shoveling.
• Use a small shovel or consider a snow thrower.
• Learn the heart attack warning signs and listen to your body. If you are not sure if it’s a heart attack, get it checked out. Don’t wait more than five minutes to call 9-1-1.
• Don’t drink alcoholic beverages before or immediately after shoveling.
• Consult a doctor.
• Be aware of the dangers of hypothermia.
• Learn CPR.

5 ways to become your own health care boss

While your doctor is the medical expert, you are your own best advocate. Practicing these five things will help put you in the driver's seat of your health care.

1. **Make health care choices based on information, not fear.** When your doctor recommends a procedure or medication, you should find out more. What are the pros and cons of the procedure? Is it truly necessary? Is this procedure covered by my insurance? Are there other ways to accomplish the same goal? What is the cost? Insurance costs are a direct reflection
of medical costs, so being a wise consumer helps with your out-of-pocket expenses and ultimately your insurance costs. Make sure you are informed on the benefits and risks of all your health care decisions, even the ones that seem obvious.

2. **Use medications responsibly.** If you have been prescribed long-term medications, make sure to use them as prescribed. When starting a new drug, ask your doctor if a generic alternative is available. You can also ask about a pill-splitting option to decrease your out-of-pocket medication costs. Americans incur $200 billion worth of care per year for illnesses and hospitalizations that could have been avoided if medications were taken as prescribed.

3. **Understand your health insurance policy.** Health insurance is complicated. But the more you know your plan, the better you will be able to understand what is covered and how much you will have to pay out of pocket. Many preventive services are covered under your plan. Check to see which services are covered. Preventive services can help prevent high costs later. In addition, when scheduling appointments, ask the provider if they participate with a Blue Cross Blue Shield plan. You will be responsible for additional costs if you see a provider who is not participating.

4. **Exercise.** Eat. Sleep. Repeat. Yes, prevention is still the best medicine. Controlling your weight with a healthy diet, regular exercise and enough sleep can help prevent the onset of diabetes, heart conditions and cognitive deficits. Even if you are young, making healthy decisions today will positively impact your health in the future decades. Controlling diet, weight and healthy habits will save you lots of money in the future.

5. **Choose the right care at the right time.** When assessing an illness or injury, ask yourself if it constitutes an emergency department visit, a walk-in clinic visit, or if you can hold off for a less-expensive office visit. Some providers offer a free nurse helpline, which may be helpful to get resolution. According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the average cost of a visit to the doctor is about $199; a visit to the ER costs about $922. About 25 percent of those visits are unnecessary.

### 7 questions to ask your health care provider

Being a wise health care consumer involves asking questions. When your health care provider recommends a specific test, procedure or medication, consider asking questions such as:

1. What are the risks associated with this?
2. Are there alternatives? Should we consider those?
3. What would you recommend to your own family member in this circumstance?
4. How will the results of this test/procedure/medication affect my treatment going forward?
5. What results can I expect?
6. What is the cost of this test/procedure/medication?
7. What can I do on my own to improve my health and the outcome of your recommendation?
Healthy Activities Spotlight
You can test your nutrition knowledge by downloading flash cards from the American Heart Association website or you can develop a fill-in-the-blank worksheet to match the word(s) with the definition.

Healthy Recipes
Looking for a healthful breakfast that’s delicious, low in carbs and full of veggies? Try the Spinach Mushroom Egg and Ham Cups recipe from the American Diabetes Association.

Spinach Mushroom Egg and Ham Cups
Prep Time: 15 minutes

Nutrition Facts
Serving Size: 1 ham muffin

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This Recipe Serves 8

Ingredients
Cooking spray
8 slices deli-style smoked ham (1/2 ounce each)
2 teaspoons olive oil
1/2 cup mushrooms, diced
1 cup baby spinach, chopped
5 eggs
1/8 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper
1/3 cup reduced-fat, shredded cheese (optional)

Instructions
1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Spray a muffin tin with cooking spray.
2. Line 8 of the muffin cups with a slice of ham.
3. Add the oil to a sauté pan and heat over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and cook for 3 minutes. Add the spinach and cook for another 3 minutes. Set the vegetables aside to cool.
4. In a medium bowl, whisk together the eggs, spinach and mushrooms, pepper, and cheese (optional).
5. Carefully fill the 8 muffin cups (lined with ham) with the egg mixture until 2/3 full (try to not let eggs drip on the sides underneath the ham slices).
6. Bake for 20-22 minutes, until the eggs are cooked through. Let cool for 5 minutes. Use a fork to go around the edges and loosen the ham and egg cups. Use a fork to scoop out each cup.
Gearing Up for Worksite Wellness Training

The next Gearing Up for Worksite Wellness training will be held Feb. 25-26 in Bismarck.

Remember, NDPERS Wellness Coordinators qualify for the discounted rate of $99.

If you are interested, email stacy.duncan@bcbsnd.com for an NDPERS-specific registration form if you do not have one already.


Monthly Wellness Coordinator call/webinar schedule

Mark your calendar for these WC calls and webinars:

- **Wednesday, February 4 at 11:00 am CST**
  To join the February call/webinar: Go to (#793 350 032)
  https://meetingcenter33.webex.com/meetingcenter33/onstage/g.php?ta&d=793350032

- **Wednesday, March 4 at noon CST**
  To join the March call/webinar: Go to (#790 868 544)
  https://meetingcenter33.webex.com/meetingcenter33/onstage/g.php?ta&d=790868544

- **Wednesday, April 1 at 1:00 pm CST**
  To join the April call/webinar: Go to (#799 701 918)
  https://meetingcenter33.webex.com/meetingcenter33
  For audio: Dial 1-877-899-3892 Code: 5582715019

If you receive the error message "this meeting is cancelled," go to the homepage of the meeting center and search for “NDPERS Wellness Coordinator Call.”

Friendly reminder: Please mute your phones during the calls as a courtesy to other listeners. If your phone does not have a mute button, dial #0 and then select option 1. To comment or ask a question, you can un-mute by again dialing #0-1. We would also like to ask that you avoid putting your line on hold, as the background music can be heard by all other participants. Thank you.

Coming up in March

Consider promoting these events next month!

- Colorectal Cancer Awareness
- Workplace Eye Wellness Month
A Partnership for Worksite Wellness

NDPERS and BCBSND are working together to support and provide you and your fellow employees the opportunity to have a healthier and more engaged worksite through Worksite Wellness tools. We appreciate feedback on all our wellness tools to serve your worksite better and welcome your suggestions.

Please take time to fill out surveys we may submit to you from time to time to evaluate these programs.

Here is a list of contacts that will be useful to you as a Wellness Coordinator:

Stacy Duncan
NDPERS Wellness Consultant
701-277-2884
stacy.duncan@bcbsnd.com
Stacy is your main resource contact. She can help you with general wellness program questions and assist you with enhancing your worksite wellness programs.

Rebecca Fricke
NDPERS
rfricke@nd.gov
Rebecca can help you with 1% premium questions, points on programs, updating coordinator information and the status or questions about the application process or forms.

Kathy Allen
NDPERS
kallen@nd.gov
Direct funding program questions to Kathy.

Onalee Sellheim
BCBSND
701-282-1154
onalee.sellheim@bcbsnd.com
Direct questions about benefit plans or schedule Member Education programs through Onalee.

Jodi Crouse
BCBSND
701-277-2059
jodi.crouse@bcbsnd.com
To collect aggregate data on your employer from the Health Reimbursement Arrangements, HealthyBlue and Health Club Credit, contact Jodi.

Heather Horner
BCBSND
heather.horner@bcbsnd.com
701-200-3905 (cell)
Contact Heather to set up a Member Education program if you are located in western North Dakota.

JoVal Wettlaufer
BCBSND
joval.wettlaufer@bcbsnd.com
701-277-2402
Contact JoVal to set up a Member Education program if you are located in eastern North Dakota.

More resources:
- www.ndworksitewellness.org
- www.ndpershealthyblue.com
- www.nd.gov/ndpers