

Holiday Health: Ways to care for your heart

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With Christmas approaching, many of us are already in shopping mode, gathering gifts for friends and loved ones. This season, why not give yourself a present—the gift of a healthy heart.

Here are four ways to put your heart at the top of the list:

1. Know the risk factors for heart disease. They are smoking, age, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and family history.

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2. Know your numbers. Blood pressure and cholesterol are the big culprits in heart disease. Do you know your numbers?

“Blood pressure is normal when the top number, the systolic reading, is less than 120,” said Kanti Agrawal, a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Garland. The lower, or diastolic, number should

be below 80.

When it comes to cholesterol, “We recommend that people have their first complete lipid profile around age 20, repeating every five years after that if levels are within the normal range,” Agrawal said.

The National Cholesterol Education Program recommends total cholesterol less than 200 mg/dL, LDL (bad cholesterol) less than 100 mg/dL, and HDL (good cholesterol) higher than 40.

If your numbers are high, talk with your physician about medication and lifestyle changes to bring them down.

3. Know the warning signs of heart attack.

- Pain, squeezing or pressure in the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back.
- Pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck or jaw.
- Shortness of breath.
- Sweating, nausea or lightheadedness.

If you experience these symptoms, call 911. Faster treatment equals less heart damage.

4. Practice prevention. Stop smoking, lose weight, exercise regularly, lower your cholesterol and lower your blood pressure. The most important step you can take? See your doctor for a regular checkup.

When you take care of your heart, you give yourself a gift that lasts season after season.

For more information about Baylor Medical Center at Garland, visit www.BaylorHealth.com.

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