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American Heart Month – Know your Numbers

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Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both women and men in the United States. About every 25 seconds, an American will have a coronary attack, and about one every minute will die from one. When it comes to your health, there are four numbers you need to know: blood pressure, blood sugar, total cholesterol, and body mass index (BMI).

High blood pressure is one of the most common risk factors for heart disease. The heart has to work harder than normal, putting strain on the heart and the blood vessels. If not treated, the heart has to work harder to pump enough blood and oxygen, and over time it causes the heart to enlarge and not be able to meet the demand put on it. Vessels also suffer and become hardened, causing the arteries to narrow and not be able to pump the amount of blood needed by organs.

According to the American Heart Association, blood pressure of less than 120 systolic and less than 80 diastolic is considered normal. A systolic pressure of 120 to 139 or a diastolic pressure of 80 to 89 is considered prehypertension and needs to be watched carefully. Any blood pressure reading equal to or greater than 140 systolic over 90 diastolic is considered high blood pressure.

The blood glucose level is the amount of glucose in the blood. Glucose is a sugar that comes from the foods we eat, and is formed and stored inside the body. Having too much sugar in the blood can cause serious health problems if not treated and put you at risk of heart disease and stroke, kidney disease, vision problems, and nerve problems in people with diabetes. Many things factor into your blood sugar levels including the medications you take (insulin or pills), the food that you eat, and the amount of exercise you do.

LDL cholesterol (known as "bad" cholesterol), can build up on the inside of artery walls, contributing to artery blockages, putting you at a higher risk for a heart attack. HDL cholesterol (known as "good" cholesterol), helps prevent arteries from becoming clogged and generally means a lower risk for a heart attack. According to the Mayo Clinic, most people should aim for an LDL level below 130 mg/dL. If you have other risk factors for heart disease, an LDL below 100 mg/d, and if you're at very high risk of heart disease, aim for an LDL level below 70 mg/dL.

Body Mass Index (BMI), is a number calculated from a person's weight and height. BMI is an indicator of body fatness and is used to screen for weight categories that may lead to health problems that may put them at risk for Hypertension, high LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, or high levels of triglycerides, Type 2 diabetes, Coronary heart disease, Stroke, Gallbladder disease, Osteoarthritis, Sleep apnea and respiratory problems, and some cancers.

Take the Go Red Heart CheckUp today to learn your risk at the following website:
<http://www.goredforwomen.org/hcu/index.aspx>. It only takes a few minutes and you will receive

a Personal Action Plan that will help you achieve your fitness and nutrition goals and live heart smart.