

Sneaky Symptoms of Heart Disease

February is American Heart Month. As the month winds down, cardiologists hope that by raising awareness of heart disease, risk factors and prevention methods, the public can charge into the year ahead armed with new heart health knowledge.

Heart disease is a leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about [659,000 Americans](#) die from heart disease each year – that is one in every four deaths.

According to Dr. Tinoy Kizhakekuttu, an OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute cardiologist, thousands of these deaths can be prevented.

SOT

Dr. Tinoy Kizhakekuttu, OSF HealthCare Cardiologist

“Heart disease is the number one killer in the US. Most people die from heart disease, but it doesn't have to be that way. It's a preventable death in my opinion. If you follow the simple seven of life and what I always say is stop smoking. Number one, exercise every day. Eat healthy, lose weight, control your cholesterol, control your blood pressure, and control your blood sugar. Those seven things will really prolong your life and prevent cardiac death.” (:33) heart disease

Detection of heart-related issues is also paramount. Most people are familiar with what Dr. Kizhakekuttu describes as the “classic textbook” symptoms of heart disease: pain, tightness or discomfort in the chest; shortness of breath; pain, numbness, weakness or coldness in your legs or arms; or pain in the neck or jaw.

There are, however, some sneaky signs of heart disease that are lesser known. Dr. Kizhakekuttu says the key to recognizing some of these symptoms is to pay attention to your body, and to voice any concerning changes to your primary care physician or cardiologist.

SOT

Dr. Tinoy Kizhakekuttu, OSF HealthCare Cardiologist

“Most patients who feel the classic cardiac symptoms do seek emergency attention. But our hope also is to catch some of those people who may not have the classic textbook description. In fact, a majority of patients fall in the not-so classic description, and people ignore symptoms. Sometimes people are not diagnosed appropriately, which delays their care, delays their treatment and causes long term mortalities and morbidities.” (:35) lesser known symptoms

Some of those lesser-known symptoms include extreme fatigue, swelling of the feet or legs, nausea or vomiting, abdominal pain, unexplained sweating, or even bad breath. Dr. Kizhakekuttu says all of these things need to be taken seriously, and patients shouldn't hesitate to contact their doctor when things are out of the ordinary.

SOT

Dr. Tinoy Kizhakekuttu, OSF HealthCare Cardiologist

“I always tell my patients, you know your body best - more than any doctors in the world. So you tell me what's bothering you. You tell me any symptom or sign of anything unusual you notice, and we will take it from there. So that really opens up the patient because they feel comfortable.” (:21) symptom types

Dr. Kizhakekuttu also recommends faithfully seeing your primary care physician on a yearly basis, and running an annual blood panel to check your lipid (cholesterol and other fats) and blood sugar levels.

These appointments not only allow your physician to keep a running record of your ongoing heart health, but are also a great opportunity to discuss any bodily changes. Dr. Kizhakekuttu says having an open and honest conversation is extremely valuable.

*****SOT*****

Dr. Tinoy Kizhakekuttu, OSF HealthCare Cardiologist

“Honest communication is the key. If patients hide things, the physicians cannot appropriately care for them. And you know physicians, we are not judgmental. We want to know what's going on with you so we can take care of you. We are not going to say, ‘oh you are a bad patient because of this,’ and so on. That's not what we do. We want to help you out.”
(:22) honest communication

For more information about OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute and to take a free heart health risk assessment, visit osfhealthcare.org/heart.