OSF HealthCare Celebrates Go Red for Women

February is American Heart Month, and OSF HealthCare is proud join forces with The American Heart Association and its Go Red for Women movement. Go Red for Women is designed to spread awareness about heart disease and stroke in women through outreach and education.

“There is a huge misconception that heart disease is a men’s problem, and it’s totally opposite actually,” said Dr. Sudhir Mungee, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute Interventional Cardiologist. “Women and heart disease is a huge public health problem, and actually compared to all cancers combined – heart disease is more prevalent in women.”

To help spread awareness, Friday, February 7 is National Wear Red Day. People are encouraged to wear red, decorate their homes and offices in red, and to encourage others to make a change to improve their heart health.

OSF HealthCare is working to bring attention to heart health awareness during the entire month of February. To find an event near you, visit osfhealthcare.org and click on Classes & Events.

More women die of heart disease and stroke than men. In fact, it remains the number one killer of women, taking one in three lives each year.

The good news is, with education and action, 80 percent of cardiac and stroke events may be prevented. The Go Red for Women movement also advocates for more research on women’s heart health, for this very reason.

“I think the first key towards prevention is education. The second thing is owning your risks,” advised Dr. Mungee. “Knowing what your risks are and what can be modified and what cannot be modified. I mean, aging and family history cannot be changed, so that’s okay. But stopping smoking and making sure you walk every day or lose weight, eat healthy, those are measures that you can take.”

According to the AHA, chest pain is often not a symptom for women. Sixty-four percent of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms.

Because these symptoms vary greatly between men and women, they are often misunderstood. While a telltale sign of a heart attack could be extreme chest pain, women are somewhat more likely to experience shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain.

Other symptoms women should look out for are dizziness, lightheadedness or fainting, pain in the lower chest or upper abdomen, and extreme fatigue.

Major heart health misconceptions:

*Heart disease is for old people. **FALSE** - Heart disease affects women of all ages. For younger women, the combination of birth control pills and smoking boosts heart disease risks by 20 percent. While the risks do increase with age, things like overeating and a sedentary lifestyle can cause plaque to accumulate and lead to clogged arteries later in life. Even if someone leads a completely healthy lifestyle, being born with an underlying heart condition can be a risk factor.

*Heart disease does not affect women who are fit. **FALSE** - Even a yoga-loving, marathon-running workout fiend cannot completely eliminate a risk for heart disease. Factors like cholesterol, eating habits, and smoking can counterbalance other healthy habits. Someone can be thin and have high cholesterol. The American Heart Association recommends getting cholesterol checked at age 20, or earlier, if there is family history of heart disease. Every woman should keep an eye on her blood pressure — even if it is only during a routine check-up.