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| **Press Release**  **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | Tim Jones | tim.jones@heartoftexashealthcare.org  325-597-2901 |

**Addressing Heart Disease is More Important Than Ever During the Pandemic**

*HTHS highlights heart disease risks and prevention during National Heart Month.*

BRADY, Texas (Jan 26, 2021) – In normal years, heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. This winter, COVID-19 is on track to tie it. What’s more, heart disease can raise the risk of serious illness of COVID-19, making for an especially deadly combo. Taking steps to lower your risk of heart disease is more important than ever.

“If you aren’t taking heart disease seriously, now is the time to start,” said Lonnie L. Vickers, MD, Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians at Brady Medical Clinic, a service of Heart of Texas Healthcare System. “It is important to monitor our health with regular checkups and never delay signs of a heart attack.”

According to the American Heart Association, approximately 92 million US adults, more than 1 in 4, live with some form of cardiovascular disease or the after-effects of stroke, including congestive heart failure, coronary heart disease and high blood pressure. Cardiovascular diseases kill an estimated 800,000 each year.

High blood pressure, stress, high cholesterol, smoking, diabetes, obesity, family history and lack of regular exercise all raise the risk of developing heart disease. Many of these factors can be controlled to a certain degree.

In addition, heart disease is one of the risk factors for developing serious illness from COVID-19. Taking control of your heart’s health is important not only for your long-term health but also for controlling your risk of serious illness as COVID-19 continues to infect many people in our community.

Talking with your healthcare provider about your risk of heart disease is an important first step. According to Dr. Vickers, a thorough physical exam of your weight, blood pressure and cardiovascular fitness can help identify possible complications.

Your local medical provider may offer resources to prevent complications and manage blood pressure for individuals who are at high risk for heart disease. A medically directed diet, medication and an exercise program are a few of the recommendations for managing heart disease. For those with especially high blood pressure or cholesterol, a provider may prescribe certain medications.

**MORE**

**Addressing Heart Disease is More Important Than Ever During the Pandemic  
Page 2**

According to Dr. Vickers, those who regularly exercise are statistically twice as likely to avoid heart attacks.

“Committing to more physical activity is always a good idea, and it may help you lower your risk of heart disease,” he said.

Exercise should be brisk enough to raise the heart and breathing rates and sustain them for at least 30 minutes without interruption, and they should be repeated at least three to five times per week.

For those who are fortunate enough to survive a heart attack, a specialized rehabilitation program is key to recovery. In Brady, the cardiac rehabilitation program at HTHS helps patients recovering from heart attack or heart surgery safely regain cardiac strength.

Dr. Vickers, added that although treatment for heart-related conditions has improved, prevention and management are better ways to promote a long life.

“Rehabilitation programs help those who have survived a heart attack recover, but not everyone is so fortunate to survive their first heart attack,” Dr. Vickers, said. “Taking charge of your health can help you reduce your risk of heart disease. Now is the best time to do so”

To learn more about your risk of heart disease, talk to your local healthcare provider during your next wellness exam.

To learn more about local healthcare services or to schedule a wellness exam at Brady Medical Clinic, please call 325-597-2114.

**About Heart of Texas Healthcare System**Heart of Texas Healthcare System provides healthcare for residents of McCulloch County and the surrounding area. Founded in 2011, the system offers a wealth of medical services, including 24-hour emergency care, advanced radiology services, a clinical laboratory, dialysis services, physical therapy, surgical services, patient education, sleep studies, and more. The system also owns and operates Brady Medical Clinic, which provides family medicine, preventive care, and acute care for minor emergencies. For additional information, please visit www.heartoftexashealthcare.org.

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