



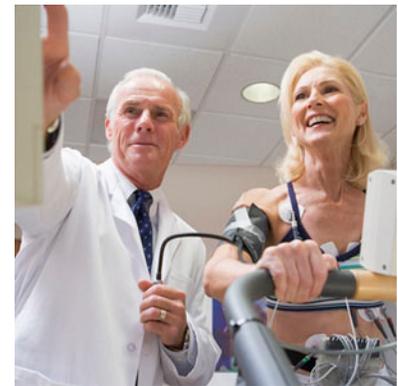
February 13, 2016 – Grand Rapids, MI

## You've Got the Ball

Two emails. Two men. Two deaths. In each case, the men likely didn't know what they didn't know. If they had known they had coronary artery disease or hypertension, they probably would have done something about it. Or maybe like many people, they wouldn't have—"that couldn't happen to me" syndrome or simply ignoring the facts. As I said on Thursday, this is American Heart Month. I'm going to give you three things you should do to reduce your risk of sudden death, the most extreme symptom of heart disease.

### Graded Exercise Test

This is a test that combines an exercise test until exhaustion, usually walking, while your EKG and blood pressure are recorded. This allows a cardiologist to examine how your heart responds to maximal conditions. Men should get a baseline test at about 40 years and women at 50 years.



The Graded Exercise Test is not foolproof, but it will allow you to find out if you have any electrical or blood flow issues in your heart. It will also let you know how your blood pressure responds to stress. From that point, you can devise a plan to work on making your heart healthier. You may not end up with a perfect heart, but you can have one that will be better and able to reduce your risk of sudden death and other forms of heart disease.

### Exercise

This is pretty simple: your heart is a muscle connected to your body by a series of arteries and veins, and those blood vessels also contain muscle. Train those muscles and they will make your heart stronger and your blood vessels more pliable. Don't exercise and your heart gets weaker the older you get. Books have been written about the benefits of exercise, but it's as simple as that.

### Check Your Feelings

The signs and symptoms of heart disease can be dramatic or subtle. Crushing chest pain? Yes, it's time to call 911; you can figure that out for yourself. How about just not feeling right? Nothing particularly wrong, but you just don't feel right. Did you know that most people have that feeling in the month before a cardiac event? Believe me, I know how that sounds.

Do the one thing that most of us, especially men, usually don't do: talk to someone about it, especially a healthcare expert. Most medical offices have phone staff such as nurses or physician assistants. They know the questions to ask you to determine whether you need to be concerned or not. If nothing else, simply talking about it can help.

One thing is absolutely clear: you've got the ball. What you do with it will determine your outcome. Just as in this past Super Bowl, you may get the ball hit from your hand; you can either dive on it and get another chance, or you can hesitate and lose it. Your body. Your choice. I hope you choose wisely today by asking yourself one question:

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**



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