

SECRETS TO HEART HEALTH

BLOOMFIELD, CT, May 24, 2010 – Today, more than ever, it's possible to give your heart a fighting chance. Advances in prevention, research and procedure are allowing people to take on America's number one killer. That was the message that Dr. Paul Thompson shared at a recent "Heart Healthy" workshop at Duncaster Retirement Community. Dr. Thompson told the audience at the Bloomfield retirement community that they can play an active part in improving their cardiovascular health. He is Director of Cardiology and The Athletes Heart Program at Hartford Hospital and Professor of Medicine at the University of Connecticut.

Dr. Thompson urged participants to take an active role in their heart health. Here are a few of his tips:

Join in the Cholesterol Limbo –The cholesterol limbo is the attempt to lower your cholesterol as low as possible (in the words of the song, "How low can you go?") For most people, he said, the lower cholesterol, the better. But, for some people trying to lower their cholesterol this may actually be dangerous. These include people with health concerns like cancer or emphysema. He advised checking with your doctor before joining in the cholesterol limbo.

Know and Understand Your Cholesterol and Triglyceride Readings - There are three factors making up the good, the bad and the ugly side of cholesterol. The "bad" cholesterol is measured by LDL levels (or low density lipoprotein). As this number goes up, so does a person's chance at having a heart attack. The "good" cholesterol is measured by HDL levels (or high density lipoproteins). The higher this number is, the lower a person's chance at a heart attack. Lastly, there is the "ugly" side of cholesterol is the triglycerides. When this number goes up, a person's risk for a heart attack goes up very steeply. He mentioned that many doctors were putting their patients on drugs called Statins, which block the production of cholesterol. People need to be careful on this, he warned, because Statins also block certain enzymes that affect muscles. Here, again, he reminded participants to consult their physicians.

Lower Your Blood Pressure – "There aren't many causes of high blood pressure except for who you chose as your parents," Dr. Thompson joked. To get some control over hypertension, he suggested two types of medications that can help lower blood pressure. One type is a diuretic that reduces the flow of blood and

another opens up blood vessels and reduces the resistance of the blood flow. There are some rare instances where another factor is the cause but in most cases a medication is the best approach. Your doctor can provide more information on specific brands.

Understand the Medicines You Are On – Some medicines can seem like wonder drugs because of the things they promise. However, people need to educate themselves about their medications. For example, Dr. Thompson talked about a drug called Coumadin (also known as Warfarin) that works as a blood thinner. This drug is extremely beneficial for older people who have atrial fibrillation, or an abnormal heart rhythm. This abnormality may cause blood clots which put people at higher risk for a stroke. Dr. Thompson warns that the combination of this drug and certain vitamin K could cause complications.

Don't Replace Prescription Medications with Over-the-Counter Substitutes– The prescription your doctor prescribes you is what you should take and for good reason. Dr. Thompson warned that over-the-counter substitutes are not always as effective or what your body needs.

Pick Exercises you Like, and Do Them Consistently– How do you choose from the variety of exercises available? Dr. Thompson answers that question with another question: "What do you like to do?" If you follow an exercise routine that you do not particularly like, you will not stick with it. Therefore, he strongly encourages people to find what it is they like to do, and do it. He personally is a fan of walking but only if you like it. If that doesn't appeal to you, find something else that you like enough to do regularly for it to be effective.

In general, Dr. Thompson encouraged the audience to take control of their own health to fully enjoy all that life offers.

About Duncaster

Duncaster is Bloomfield's signature retirement community. Celebrating 25 years, this campus of 190 independent residences, assisted living and Duncaster's Caleb Hitchcock Health Center is designed to help residents live life to the fullest by providing security and fulfillment. The community includes an aquatic and fitness center and an on-site health clinic. Residents can participate in ongoing education, social and cultural programs. For more information, see www.duncaster.org or call (860) 380-5005.

About Dr. Paul Thompson

Dr. Thompson is Director of Cardiology and The Athletes Heart Program at Hartford Hospital and Professor of Medicine at the University of Connecticut. He has authored over 200 scientific articles and is an Associate Editor of the Textbook of Cardiovascular Medicine and the Editor of the book Exercise and Sports Cardiology. He is a Past President of the American College of Sports Medicine.

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