

What Wise Women Know

We feel obligated to our family. That's just how Native women are. We put our children, partners, parents and extended family members first. So putting ourselves first can be hard. But sometimes that's what we need to do to avoid diabetes, heart disease and other illnesses. We have to take time for ourselves, to exercise and eat right.

A program in Juneau, Alaska, knows that Native women want to take care of their families. It feels good. But, we must also take care of ourselves, so we will be around for a long time!

The Wisewoman Program has a goal to help Native women have healthy hearts. The program helps women be more active, eat healthier foods and quit smoking.

It's a success! Many women are exercising, eating healthy foods and losing weight. One of the main reasons the program is working is because it encourages all women to include their families.

Take a walk in the woods with your partner! Gather shellfish on the beach with your children! Change the eating habits of your whole family! These are messages that Native women like to hear.

Charmayne Druley (Tlingit) has been a member of the Wisewoman Program for 1 ½

years. She agrees that her husband, three children and two stepchildren are very important. She says she sticks with the program because her entire family is involved.

"My husband walks with me. He has lost 15 pounds," she says.

Every family member has become more active and changed eating habits. They eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. They eat less fast food and fewer chips and fried foods. They make dinner, and don't eat as many TV dinners.

"Now, my children ask for healthy meals," says Charmayne.

Since joining the Wisewoman Program, Charmayne has lost 10 inches. Her dress size has gone from 22 to 16. Her blood sugar and cholesterol levels have gone down.

She says she has changed her lifestyle. Here are some things she does regularly:

- ▶ has her blood sugar and cholesterol checked
- ▶ wears a pedometer, and tries to walk at least 10,000 steps each day
- ▶ goes to Wisewoman cooking classes and learns new recipes that use less fat and sugar
- ▶ swims
- ▶ knows when she feels stress, then breathes deeply or exercises to get rid of stress

Everything that Charmayne does to help her heart will also help her prevent diabetes. She wants to stay healthy for herself and for her family. She does not think she is a hero. These changes took many months. She did not do them by herself.

She is thankful to her grandfather for making her feel special when she was a child. She is thankful to her husband and children for joining her in making healthy lifestyle changes.

Charmayne has a stressful job. She says the Wisewoman Program taught her how to get rid of stress. Regular exercise helps her. And, when she feels stressed, she takes time out to breathe deeply.





About Women and Heart Disease

Charmayne Druley (Tlingit) is at risk for heart disease and diabetes. She knows that the leading cause of death for women is heart disease. She is taking steps to reduce her risk. She is part of the Wisewoman Program at the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium.

Charmayne is learning that what she does to prevent heart disease will also help her prevent diabetes. She is eating more healthy foods and being active every day.

Her husband and children are joining her. Her husband walks with her. He has lost 15 pounds. Her children are eating fewer fast foods and more fresh foods. Charmayne is glad her entire family is taking steps to reduce their risk for heart disease.

What is heart disease?

Coronary heart disease, the most common form of heart disease, affects the blood vessels of the heart. It causes heart attacks and angina. Angina is a pain in the chest that happens when a part of the heart does not get enough blood.

Are Native American women at risk for heart disease?

Yes. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

If I have diabetes, am I at greater risk?

Yes. Women with diabetes are more likely than others to die from heart attacks. Controlling your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol level will help reduce your risk.

What puts Native American women at risk for heart disease?

You are at risk for heart disease if you:

- have diabetes
- have high blood pressure
- have high cholesterol
- are overweight or obese
- are not physically active
- smoke or use tobacco

Do women experience heart attacks differently than men?

Yes. When a man has a heart attack, he will often feel pressure, fullness, squeezing, or pain in the center of the chest. It often lasts longer than a few minutes, or comes and goes. The pain might spread to one or both arms, the back, jaw or stomach. He might have cold sweats and nausea. While some women have similar symptoms, there are others to watch out for.

What are some different symptoms women should look for?

Women may have symptoms such as an upset stomach, a burning feeling in the upper abdomen and light-headedness.

How can I reduce my risk of heart disease?

There are many small ways to help reduce your chances for getting heart disease. You can:

- keep your blood pressure under control
- keep cholesterol at healthy levels—eat more fresh fruits and vegetables—eat more lean meats and

MORE →

continued from previous page

fewer
high-fat foods

- don't smoke
- get at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week—if you are just starting to exercise, see your health care provider first—start slowly with 10 minutes of exercise
- maintain a healthy weight—ask your health care provider what a healthy weight is for you
- choose foods carefully—eat less fat, less salt, fewer calories and more fiber

How can I help my family reduce their risk of heart disease?

The steps you take to reduce your risk will help your entire family. Your partner and children can join you in preventing heart disease. Start today!

- be physically active daily
 - take walks together
 - ride bikes
 - go swimming
 - play basketball
- eat more healthy foods
 - eat more fresh fruits and vegetables
- eat more lean meats

- eat fewer high-fat and high-sugar foods
- avoid tobacco
 - if you smoke, stop
 - if you don't smoke, don't start
- take care of your spirit
 - pray or meditate every day
 - walk in nature
 - learn more about your traditions
 - choose to be around people who treat you with respect
 - know you are worthy of love



Produced by IHS
Division of Diabetes Treatment
and Prevention, 2/2012

“It’s not work! It’s guilt-free fun!”

Sandra Armijo (Santa Ana) has been running and doing aerobics for 15 years. It helps prevent diabetes and makes her feel great. She says making time for herself is a good thing.

“At first, I felt some guilt. I thought I should be home. But, if I wasn’t exercising, I’d be home, sitting on the couch, eating chips! My health is important for me and my family!”

