

# Taking a healthy lifestyle to heart

**She is thin. She is active. She watches what she eats. She does not smoke.**



Janet Luehrsmann, 65, does not look like a typical heart attack patient.

However, Janet has a strong family history of heart disease. Her father had his first heart attack in his 40s. Her younger brother had a heart attack in his 40s, and her older sister had a heart attack in her late 50s.

“But I thought I was exempt. I never thought it would happen to me. My brother smoked. My sister was heavier than I am. I was active, but there were silent changes going on. I just thought I was getting older – a heart problem never entered my mind,” says Janet, who, ironically, is an RN.

“You attribute your symptoms to other things,” she continues. “As we get older, how often do we have a day without an ache or pain? When it is subtle, you can put it out of your mind because it doesn’t knock you to the ground.”

Cardiologist M. Naser Payvandi, MD, says knowing your family’s heart disease history is very important. He recommends children who have a strong family history of heart disease have regular cholesterol testing and do all they can to control the potential risk factors, including: absolutely no smoking, treatment of high

Janet Luehrsmann, 65, had a heart attack and now encourages heart-healthy habits in her family members. Pictured right to left, behind Janet and her husband, Ron, are granddaughters Ashley and Courtney Chipokas, daughter Rocky Chipokas, son Rory Luehrsmann, and son and wife Ryan and Katie (holding Brady) Luehrsmann.



Robert Braksiek, MD  
Emergency Physician



M. Naser Payvandi, MD  
Cardiologist

blood pressure, and looking for and treatment of diabetes if present. He stresses the importance of promoting a heart-healthy lifestyle in very young children.

Although Janet ignored her symptoms, she was forced to face reality when she had a heart attack Feb. 4, 2008.

On Sunday, Feb. 3, Janet felt very tired and thought she was getting the flu. Later in the day she had a dull ache in her right arm, but it went away after a while. Monday morning, she felt “blah.” Janet went to the grocery store Monday afternoon.

“I was pushing the cart and all of a sudden I thought ‘I can’t do this.’ I got short of breath. I got to the car, went home and called my doctor,” she says.

Her doctor advised her to go to the hospital and she asked her husband, Ron, to take her to Mercy Medical Center. She remembers thinking it would be a waste of time.

“All of a sudden, I got really sick. I got nauseated and vomited. I got sweaty and had shortness of breath,” she says. “When we were almost to the hospital I said ‘Ron, hurry, hurry.’ I felt pressure – a tightening in my chest. I knew I was having a heart attack then.”

Upon Janet’s arrival at Mercy, she was seen by Emergency Department (ED) triage nurse

Erica Parrish, who immediately knew Janet was in trouble. Erica called in ED physician Robert Braksiek, MD, within minutes of Janet’s arrival.

“Janet was in critical condition when I first met her,” says Dr. Braksiek. “She had unstable vital signs with extremely low blood pressure and heart rate – a true life-threatening

emergency. Her EKG showed a massive heart attack and I was concerned that her condition could prove fatal. Through the coordinated efforts of the emergency room staff we were able to stabilize her condition and rush her to the catheterization lab, where Dr. Payvandi was able to perform a life-saving angioplasty.”

Because Dr. Braksiek quickly recognized the severity of her situation, Janet was in the cardiac cath lab within 30 minutes of her arrival at Mercy.

Janet credits the quick actions of all the ED staff, the cath lab staff and Dr. Payvandi with saving her life. She is now back at work and advises others to pay attention to their family histories of heart disease, eat healthy, stay active, and

pay close attention to any subtle signs and symptoms of heart disease.

“I have to make myself a priority,” she says. “If I don’t, I won’t be here for anybody else.”

A heart-healthy lifestyle, says Dr. Payvandi, includes: not smoking; a diet rich in fish and vegetables; and a regular and consistent exercise program.

**“I thought I was exempt. I never thought it would happen to me.”**

Janet Luehrsmann  
Heart attack patient



Mercy’s Heart Disease and Women Program is the only one in the nation certified by The Joint Commission.