

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment where we feature news and information that you can use to live a healthier lifestyle. This is Katie Johnson, your host, and I have two guests today from our cardiac rehab program. Nancy Nubson is an RN here in cardiac rehab and we have a patient guest today, Vanessa Baxter, who is a cardiac rehab patient from Fergus Falls, currently in rehab after experience a heart attack in December. Good morning, ladies.

Nancy Nubson: Good morning.

Vanessa Baxter: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: February is heart health month and we like to bring awareness to heart disease, and particularly heart disease in women. I asked Nancy for a patient story that we could share this month to really put some personal story behind heart health and heart disease, and Vanessa, you were the first name that came to Nancy's mind. I think part of the reason might be because you experienced your heart attack at such a young age. Can you tell us a little bit about your age, your family history, and exactly what happened?

Vanessa Baxter: Okay, so I'm 36. It was actually just about two weeks after I turned 36 and my mom had just recently had a heart attack in March of last year, so she had told me what her signs were. She waited a little too long to go to the hospital. She said, "You know, I just felt like I came down with the flu or I pulled a muscle," and I was doing laundry and just put a load in the washer and then all of a sudden I'm like, it felt like I had indigestion and I thought that doesn't feel quite right so I took an antacid and I sat down for a minute. All of a sudden I felt pain go, it traveled up into my neck and down my arm but it really didn't feel like a hurtful pain. It was more just like a sore muscle and then all of a sudden I decided, hey, this doesn't feel quite right and I jumped on the internet and I'm like, well, which arm is it supposed to be starting to hurt because it was radiating down my arm. It said left arm and I'm like, okay.

I called my husband who was actually away from the home and said, "I think I'm having a heart attack. Come home. I need to go to the hospital." He's like, "Vanessa, you're not having a heart attack, but if you feel that something's wrong, I'll come home and we'll go to the doctor." We went into the hospital and found out that it was indeed a heart attack and they ended up transferring me to Essentia in Fargo to get treatment.

Katie Johnson: Wow, so do you think that if that hadn't happened to your mom you would have been as in tune to the signals that your body was giving you?

Vanessa Baxter: No, I wouldn't have. I would have felt like it would have been more of a crushing pain. I didn't have nausea or any of the other symptoms that you hear when you hear all the warnings. Other than the fact that the pain really felt like what my mom had described to me, I don't think I would have been as quick to say, "I need

to go to the hospital. Take me in. Something's not right," because at first it was just kind of a mild discomfort. As it progressed throughout the evening in the hospital, I feel that at some point when the pain did get worse I would have went in, but it really was good that my mom had told me of her experience because I knew I needed to go in sooner.

Katie Johnson: Is this pretty typical, Nancy, of what you hear from other women patients?

Nancy Nubson: Yes, it's very typical. I see groups of women at a time sometimes and we talk about symptoms or what provoked their situation. Women, more often than men, have more vague symptoms of just overwhelming weakness or they just don't feel right. They get the discomfort, but it's not real pain. I even hear men say that too, though, that I didn't go in because it wasn't severe pain like the picture that we see on the television or in magazines where they're clutching their chest and it's hurting so bad. A lot of times it's just an ache, a discomfort, an indigestion, a heavy or full or tight feeling.

Katie Johnson: What kind of difference does getting there early make, taking that action early that Vanessa said, "Maybe later on when it got more uncomfortable," or referring to her mom waiting a little bit too long. What kind of difference does time make?

Nancy Nubson: Well, when a person's having a heart attack, there's no oxygen to a part of the heart muscle and that's what's causing the pain as that heart muscle is basically dying. We want to get there quick so some treatment can be given. Getting medications or getting to a cath lab where Lake Region Healthcare is excellent at getting people identified that need to have an angiogram done. They get sent very quickly to a facility that can treat them quick. They make sure they send them to a place that has a cath lab that's open so they can get right in and they can treat it. That's the best way because that can reopen the vessel and get oxygen to that heart muscle and none of the heart dies. It all lives. It causes an abortion of that heart attack and that's what we need to have happen.

That's really important to get in when you notice symptoms, for sure if you can get in within the first ... They say a minute worth of chest pain that isn't something that you normally think as something that you have, if it's concerning to you especially if you have any associated symptoms of sweating or weakness or shortness of breath or feeling like you might throw up or vomiting, you should go in and be checked out if you have any of those associated symptoms. If it goes on for a few minutes, if it's getting worse, think about seeking help.

Vanessa was right. She said, "I need to go to the emergency room." That is what needs to happen. Don't go to a walk in clinic or go to your regular doctor's office and sit and wait. In fact, when you go to the emergency room and you go to check in, tell them, "I think I'm having something going on with my heart," or if you have breathing problems, "I can't breathe," because they triage people. They see people according to their severity of need and urgency.

Katie Johnson: Very good advice. Vanessa, you did the right thing in that sense. You had your treatment and now you're at cardiac rehab. Tell us about what this stage of your recovery is like.

Vanessa Baxter: It's actually very exciting. I'm learning new things. I'm getting back into shape. I was going to the gym prior to the incident, and then after, it was really hard to understand that, hey, you can't do it quite like you used to do it and it kind of slows things down. Nancy and Kayla both have been a great help in getting me back up to where I was, and actually I think doing more than I was. I'm doing weights and all the machines and doing about an hour workout on the three days that I'm here a week.

They've been great at giving me advice on diet changes. That's one of the things. I need to lose some weight. I'm a little overweight, and to not only pick up a cardiac healthy diet, but to also learn what I can do to lose weight. They've been great at even pulling recipes for me to find that are healthier recipes to make at home to help aid my diet and nutrition, and have given me tips on how much sodium I should be taking in, different things as far as lower fat options and lower cholesterol options, gave me the Heart Association website to find more recipes. They've just really set me on a healthier lifestyle path so that I can continue to live, since I am so young, and not have it affect me, and so I can have a long and healthy life even after a heart attack.

Katie Johnson: What a great resource. You were connected with cardiac rehab by your physician? Is that how that worked as a next step?

Vanessa Baxter: Yes, when I was in the hospital, the doctor and the cardiologist who had seen me and done all of the treatment at the hospital, when they released me they had actually contacted cardiac rehab. Then I got a nice little packet and told me what I needed to do so that I could start right away and came in here in the end of December.

Katie Johnson: Great. It sounds like you are on the right path and like you said looking forward to a long and healthy future with putting into practice the things that you're learning here at cardiac rehab. Looking back, is there anything you wish you would have known or you think you would have done different that you could offer to listeners as advice if you'd have known that a heart attack at age 36 was a potential in your future?

Vanessa Baxter: I would say you need to take into account that we need to be more active. You should be out exercising and doing things that make your body healthy. I led quite a sedentary life and had just started to make the changes recently, as little as six months before the heart attack. I wish I would have done that sooner, and my eating habits were terrible, so I think you need to take into account what you're putting into your body because that certainly did not help with my situation.

Katie Johnson: Your family history, you mentioned your mom. Was there other family history of

heart disease that you were aware of?

Vanessa Baxter: Yes. Not necessarily a heart attack, but my grandfather did die at 67 from congestive heart failure due to, he had sleep apnea, which is something that I recently learned I had. I would have probably checked into that a little bit closer. If you do have a family history, I think it's important for you to start making the changes now rather than waiting until something happens because in my case I was lucky, but you never know if it could have easily went the other way and I wouldn't have survived. It would have been a terrible, it would be a tragic event for me to die at 36.

Katie Johnson: Right, how about you Nancy, anything that you'd like to add?

Nancy Nubson: I'm so thankful. Vanessa's just such a delightful lady. I'm so happy to have her with us, to be able to work with her. She's just a wonderful person. It's great to have her here, and I'm so thankful she lived through her event.

Katie Johnson: And that she has cardiac rehab and a committed attitude towards a healthier lifestyle going forward is just the best news to hear as we look back on what things were like in December and what things are like today. I think you have to feel pretty good about that.

Vanessa Baxter: I do, and I have a great team working with me and that makes a big difference in the end too. It's something I actually look forward to coming in to cardiac rehab because they are so great.

Katie Johnson: Vanessa Baxter, thank you so much for sharing your story with us. We wish you the best on your continued road to recovery from your heart attack in December, and thanks for sharing what you've learned with our listeners this morning.

Vanessa Baxter: Thank you.

Katie Johnson: Vanessa Baxter and Nancy Nubson, our guests today on Apple a Day as we talk about heart health month here in February and remind you that there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.

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