My Healthy Decisions

Listen to your heart

"I believe sometimes we think we are invincible, but in reality we are quite fragile in the whole scheme of things," says Marge Miller, who underwent heart surgery for blocked arteries and a life-threatening aneurysm. "Now what I would say to other women is: Don't be in denial. It can kill you. You know your body better than anyone else—pay attention to any regular abnormal signs, no matter how small."

In 2014, Miller, a longtime respiratory therapist, had been experiencing fatigue and shortness of breath for some weeks. Then, after walking up a hill going into work, she had a brief "finger-poking" sensation in her mid-chest area. "I attributed all these symptoms to being overweight, holiday overindulgence, a lack of exercise and getting older. And I had no pain at all," Miller says. "But, when your colleagues say you don't look good, take it to heart—literally—it might save your life."

TAKE SYMPTOMS SERIOUSLY

"I came to work that Thursday morning, expecting to go home like any other workday," says Miller, who lives in Warren, near Richfield Springs. At her co-workers' strong urging—because she didn't look or feel good—Miller made an acute appointment with her primary care provider, who, after performing

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Listen to your heart

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an electrocardiogram, sent her to the emergency department (ED). After a consult with Bassett cardiologist Vivian Clark, MD, in the ED, a cardiac catheterization was ordered. Dhananjai Menzies, MD, an interventional cardiologist at Bassett Healthcare Network, performed the procedure. "He spoke with me and put my mind at ease," says Miller. "We also joked as to why I was on that side of the table."

Miller is known for being the one taking care of others on the job and at home. In addition to her work as a respiratory therapist, she is a certified critical care EMT, a CPR instructor and a member of the Springfield Fire Department. She is also very involved with her family's organic dairy farm and with looking after members of her extended family.

LIFE-IMPROVING SURGERY

During the catheterization, Dr. Menzies noted two vessels blocked at about 65 percent and an alarming, nearly 100 percent blocked aneurysm on the left anterior descending coronary artery—aptly called the widowmaker. Arrangements were made to have John Kelley, MD, Bassett's chief of cardiac surgery, perform a triple coronary artery bypass graft, or CABG, right away. The surgery and recovery went smoothly.

Marge Miller makes time to take care of herself.

HEART DISEASE

affects men and women equally, yet the early warning signs can be different for women. To view video, go to **bassett.org/heart-disease-women**.

"Sometimes the most subtle symptoms, like fatigue or shortness of breath, should not be ignored, as they can indicate a life-threatening condition," says Dr. Menzies. "Fortunately, in Marge's case, she took action and was able to have life-improving surgery."

"I followed all instructions exactly as directed, completed cardiac rehab and have done quite well," says Miller. "Since surgery, I have tried to watch my weight and eat more vegetables—organic whenever possible—and exercise at least three times a week.

"I have many irons in the fire in my life, and resting was never an option until my work was done. Since this life-altering experience, I have readjusted my expectations. I now rest in between my jobs at home. I stop and smell the roses as they say. Family has become more important to me. I am looking at life differently now. Most importantly, my advice to others is to pay attention and don't ignore symptoms; they could be early warning signs of something more serious.

"Dr. Menzies and Dr. Kelley are amazing. I cannot begin to tell them how thankful I am that I am here today."

BASSETT HEART CARE INSTITUTE offers comprehensive heart care services throughout Bassett Healthcare Network. For more information, visit **bassett.org/heart** or call **800-BASSETT (800-227-7388)**.

MyHealthy Decisions is published as a community service and to provide general health information. It is not intended to provide personal medical advice, which should be obtained from your primary care provider. Models may be used in photos and illustrations.

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Prevention is the best medicine

Donna Thomson, with her dog, Kemosabe

IF you could benefit from a heart-health assessment, Bassett Healthcare Network now offers a Preventive Cardiology Program & Lipid Clinic for people at risk for heart disease.

PROVIDING PEACE OF MIND

For Donna Thomson, 69, grandmother of five, the program provides peace of mind following an onset of symptoms that led her to the emergency room.

"I've always been an active person," says Thomson, of Cooperstown. "In autumn, I began experiencing chest pressure, dizziness and nausea."

When Thomson's symptoms hindered her ability to enjoy golf and tennis, she knew something wasn't right. "Thankfully, I had not suffered a heart attack, but I did learn that my blood pressure needs to be monitored more closely. When something doesn't feel right, always address it."

Thomson was referred to Bassett's Preventive Cardiology Program & Lipid Clinic, where she underwent a heart-health evaluation and began a lifestyle management plan.

REDUCE YOUR RISK

"If you have risk factors, it is important to examine them and make a plan to lower your risk and get heart-healthy," says Merle Myerson, MD, program director, board-certified lipid specialist and expert in the prevention of cardiovascular disease.

The program is for individuals who:

- Wish to reduce their risk of heart attack, stroke and peripheral vascular disease (or prevent progression).
- Want a risk factor assessment.
- Wish to pursue healthy lifestyle modifications, including medication management.
- Have hard-to-control blood pressure, cholesterol or diabetes.
- Have trouble tolerating medication side effects.
- Have a family history of heart or cardiovascular disease.

"Dr. Myerson is supportive and comforting, and I feel confident that my nutrition and exercise plans will keep me on the right track," says Thomson.

The program offers cholesterol and lipid testing, blood pressure management, smoking cessation assistance, nutrition evaluation, weight-loss counseling, and screenings for cardiovascular disease.

"Bassett's program is dedicated to improving quality of life for patients and helping those with risk factors lower their chance of developing heart disease," says Dr. Myerson. "Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 killer of men and women in the United States, and prevention is more important than ever."

What are lipids?

Lipid is a term for fats. There are two types—cholesterol and triglycerides. **Cholesterol** is a waxy substance providing energy, produced by the body and found in foods. **Triglycerides** are found in blood and foods. Excess triglycerides are caused by weight gain, lack of exercise, smoking, alcohol use and carbohydrates. High levels of lipids are linked to heart disease. **Maintaining healthy lipid numbers is important in preventing heart disease and stroke.**

IF YOU MAY BENEFIT from Bassett's Preventive Cardiology Program & Lipid Clinic, contact your primary care provider or call **607-547-3180**. Services are available at Bassett Medical Center in Cooperstown and FoxCare Center in Oneonta. Learn more at **bassett.org/preventive-cardiology**.

Make the call now

Call 911 right away

if you think you or someone else is having a heart attack. **Fast action can save lives.**

Bassett Healthcare Network

Bassett Medical Center
1 Atwell Road
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Check your heart **before you start**

REGULAR exercise is an important way to lower your risk of heart disease, but you may wonder if it is safe for you to begin an exercise program or increase your level of exercise.

Bassett Heart Care Institute's Pre-Exercise Heart Screening Program is ready to help you reduce the risk for cardiovascular problems associated with participation in routine exercise as well as competitive and recreational sports.

"This program is important for not only older athletes who may have been sedentary but who want to start exercising or ramp up their exercise program, but it's also appropriate for younger athletes who may have inherited a genetic abnormality that puts them at risk for having a serious cardiac problem when playing competitive or team sports," says Merle Myerson, MD, Bassett cardiologist and applied and exercise physiology expert. "We want people to exercise—whether that's walking every day or running a 10K. Exercise is great for your heart, and we want you to do it safely."

The program is designed for individuals:

- Who have been inactive and want to start an exercise program or are active but wish to intensify their exercise.
- Who want to play competitive or team sports or participate at a higher level in a sport.
- With a family history of sudden cardiac death, irregular heart rhythms or congenital heart problems.
- Who have symptoms including fainting, chest pain or shortness of breath with exercise.

Merle Myerson, MD

Interested in Bassett's Pre-Exercise Heart Screening Program? Call **607-547-3180** or **800-BASSETT** (**800-227-7388**).

Your diet, too, can lower your risk of heart disease.

Savor the
MEDITERRANEAN
FOR A HEALTHIER HEART

EVERYDAY EATS
- FRUITS AND VEGETABLES
- WHOLE GRAINS
- BEANS, LEGUMES & NUTS
- OLIVE OIL FOR PREPARING FOOD

ENJOY DAILY OR WEEKLY
- FISH (2–3 servings weekly)
- EGGS
- LOW-FAT DAIRY FOODS
- POULTRY

LIMIT OR AVOID
- SWEETS
- RED MEAT