

HEALTHY TIMES North Shore-Ryde Health Service general manager SUE SHILBURY

Heed the early warning signs

WITH one in three deaths attributed to some form of cardiovascular disease, it is Australia's biggest killer.

Almost everyone knows someone who has been affected by it.

This week – Heart Week – Royal North Shore Hospital is focusing on the warning signs of heart attack. To the clinical experts, a heart attack is a “myocardial infarction”.

Early warning signs

For some people, the first sign of heart disease is a heart attack or sudden death.

Fortunately, most have early warning signs. If these warning signs are recognised and acted upon, a heart attack can be prevented. So what are these warning signs?

There may be a new awareness of chest tightness, shortness of breath or fatigue when walking or performing normal daily tasks. These feelings ease only when the person rests.

The feeling may be like a band or weight across the chest, which may also be felt in the left arm or both arms, or into the neck. It may be more noticeable in cold weather, after meals, in the morning or when the person is upset or emotional.

RNSH senior specialist cardiologist and North Shore Heart Research Foundation medical director Professor Geoffrey Tofler said these early warnings were like cautionary road signs warning a precipice was ahead.

“The best action is to promptly seek medical help, for investigation and treatment,” he said. “It may turn out that a coronary artery has a tight narrowing which can be opened up with a balloon and stent.

“Or the cause may turn out to not be heart-related, which is reassuring.”

Prof Tofler and RNSH colleagues have interviewed 500 people who have had heart at-

TIPS FOR A HEALTHY HEART



EXERCISE REGULARLY. As well as improving fitness and flexibility, exercise stimulates the body's immune system, reduces blood thickening so it clots less easily, improves brain function and lowers blood pressure.

EAT INTELLIGENTLY. Make sure you monitor your intake of kilojoules and foods high in saturated fats.

KEEP TRACK of your health measurements. This includes cholesterol levels, blood pressure, weight, sugar levels and waist size.

STAY OPTIMISTIC. Studies show a positive state of mind can protect heart health.

tacks to find out more about the symptoms and triggers before the attack, to gain new clues to prevent the condition.

“A significant number had warning signs that they didn't recognise or act on,” he said. “This inaction by people is by no

means related to intelligence, age or gender. Often, it is because of a tendency to ignore symptoms, attributing them to something like indigestion.”

Perhaps surprisingly, as the condition is often mistakenly stereotyped as a man's disease,

53 per cent of victims of cardiovascular disease are women.

Prof Tofler is undertaking North Shore Heart Research Foundation-funded research into heart disease.

» To donate, visit heartresearch.com.au