

Heart Smart

CARDIAC CARE

OCTOBER 2011



A pacemaker solved Sara's heart condition

+ MOTHER-DAUGHTER LINK

What your mom can teach you about your own heart health **PAGE 3**

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The questions you should be asking your cardiologist **PAGE 4**

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FOLD

Staying *in* Sync

Baylor helps one woman keep up her active lifestyle

One minute, everything was fine. But the next thing she knew, Sara N. Lee was lying on the floor with her dog licking her face.

Even though she'd lost consciousness briefly, Lee says she didn't give the incident much thought until she started having more frequent episodes.

"I would feel uneasy when I was away from home because I was afraid of passing out," says Lee, a 76-year-old resident of Arlington and a proud grandmother who also volunteers as a guardian for an older woman.

Lee's doctor referred her to a cardiologist, who diagnosed her with a condition known as vasovagal syncope.



Sara N. Lee

"The reason people pass out from vasovagal syncope is because they have a marked slowing of the heart rate or a marked decrease in blood pressure—or both—which is thought to be related to defective

wiring between the brain and the heart," says Manish D. Assar, M.D., a cardiac electrophysiologist on the medical staff at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital.

Triggers for vasovagal syncope vary, depending on the person. In Lee's case, it's having something to drink, which is known as swallow syncope. Other triggers include prolonged standing, pain and certain odors.

According to Dr. Assar, the most effective treatment for many is education. If people know what triggers their episodes, they may be able to avoid them. There are also medications that can help. In rare circumstances, a pacemaker is needed.

For Lee, the solution was a pacemaker because the top and bottom chambers of her heart weren't synchronizing properly. A pacemaker is implanted into the chest and activates when needed to correct irregular heart rhythms.

Since getting her pacemaker six years ago, Lee hasn't passed out once. "I can feel the symptoms and I think, 'Oh, I'd better sit down,' but then the pacemaker does its job and I'm fine," she says.

Dr. Assar emphasizes that vasovagal syncope is a benign condition. "But if it's something that's affecting someone's daily activities," he says, "then it's time to seek treatment."



Do You Need Heart Help?

For a referral to a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital or Baylor Dallas, call **1-800-4BAYLOR** or visit **FindDrRight.com**.

KNOW YOUR numbers

3.5%

Syncope will affect 3.5 percent of women during their lives. Vasovagal syncope is the most common type of syncope.

2x

Men and women older than 75 may be up to twice as likely to experience syncope, but it can happen at any age.

600K

The approximate number of pacemakers implanted worldwide each year.

7-10

The average number of years a pacemaker battery lasts. Replacement is a minor procedure.



All in the Family

What your family history can tell you about your heart health

Maybe you inherited your mother's eyes or her passion for music. If she has heart disease, you may have inherited that, too.

Research shows that if either of your parents has had a heart attack, you are one and a half times more likely to have one, too. Your risk is six times greater if both parents have had a heart attack.

"If one or both parents had a heart attack in their 50s, their children are likely to have their first cardiac event in their 40s," says Barbara Leeper, M.N., R.N.-B.C., CNS M-S, a clinical nurse specialist for cardiovascular services at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas.

Clearly, it's important to know your family history—and not just your parents' health story. If your brother

or sister has had a heart attack, you're at higher risk, too. Leeper suggests going back at least two generations to learn as much as you can and then sharing that information with your doctor.

While you can't change your genetics, you can reduce some of your risk factors, such as poorly managed diabetes and high blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Maintaining an appropriate weight, eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and not smoking are also risk-reducers.

"Some experts recommend that people who have a heart attack in their 30s or 40s may want to begin monitoring their children's lipid profiles," Leeper adds.

Be sure to ask your doctor about the screening tests you and your family need and how often to get them.

Write It Down

To begin tracking your own family history, request a free copy of the Family History Card at BaylorHeartHospital.com/FamilyHistory.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO STENTING

Cardiac catheterization has become a routine procedure, but there's more than one way to get the job done.

Typically, a long thin tube called a catheter is inserted through a blood vessel in the upper leg and guided to the heart. The catheter can be used as part of diagnostic testing or to perform angioplasty or stenting to open blocked arteries.

But the catheter doesn't always have to be inserted through the leg. In many cases, it can go through the radial artery, which is in the wrist and adjacent to the thumb.

Radial artery stenting is currently available at only a small percentage of U.S. hospitals, but it does have distinct advantages, says Ravi Vallabhan, M.D., an interventional cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital.

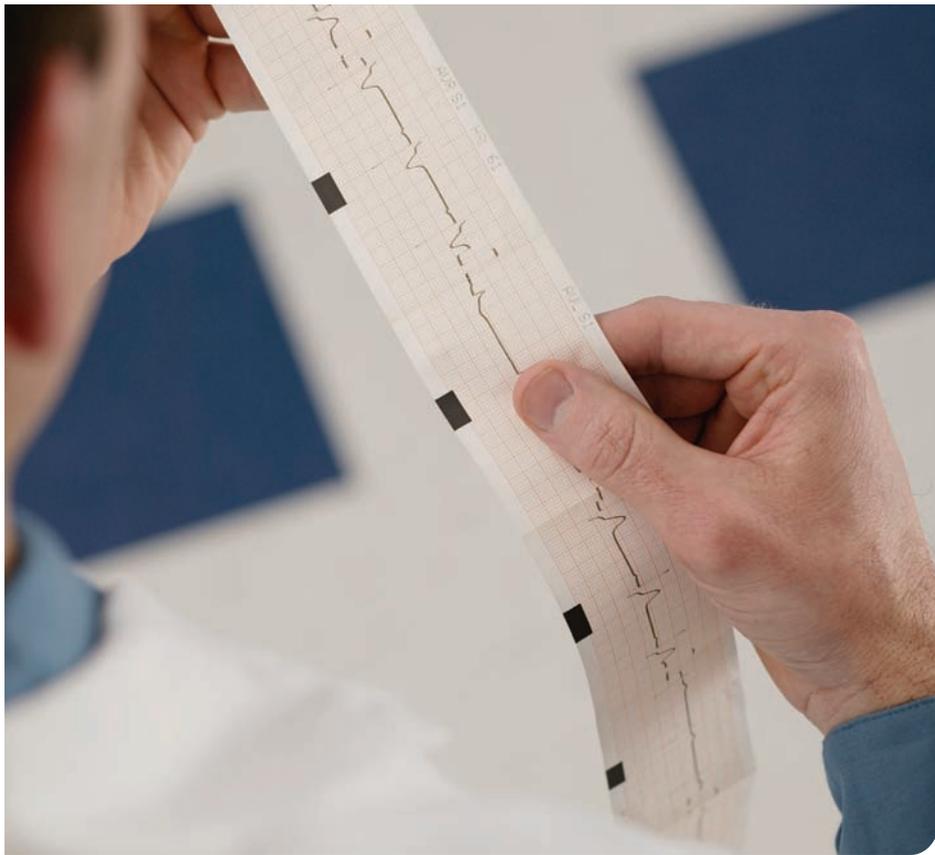
"Patients can sit up immediately after the radial artery procedure, and it's much easier to get the area to stop bleeding and to heal than it is when you do it from the leg," he explains. "So there's more patient comfort and less potential access-site bleeding complications."

Dr. Vallabhan says radial artery catheterization is ideal in cases of patients who are obese, when access through the leg can be more difficult. On the other hand, people shorter than 5 feet 5 inches or who are very slim—such as women—might not be good candidates because they have smaller radial arteries.

"It's like anything in medicine," he says. "We apply the technique to the right patient population that's going to get the maximum benefit from it."

Get the Scoop on Stenting

For more information on the radial artery procedure or to watch a patient testimonial, visit BaylorHeartHospital.com/RadialArtery.



Recognizing Heart Rhythm Problems

If your heart skips a beat during a scary movie, it's probably just the excitement of the moment. But your heart skipping a beat more than once in a while or a racing heartbeat when at rest could be signs of a heart rhythm problem.

There are different types of heart rhythm irregularities, and they won't feel the same to everyone who experiences them, says Georges Feghali, M.D., a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital.

Some people will feel a fluttering or a racing in their hearts; others will sense that their heartbeat isn't steady. Sometimes the irregular heartbeat will start out of the blue or come and

go. And quite often it is accompanied by other symptoms such as nausea, fatigue, dizziness or chest pain.

"Usually patients will notice sudden onset or offset of symptoms," Dr. Feghali says. "Any information about what they're feeling can help guide our diagnosis."

An exam or diagnostic test, such as an electrocardiogram (EKG), is the only way to know for sure what heart rhythm problem the patient is experiencing.

Any irregular heartbeat should be reported to a doctor, says Dr. Feghali, adding that women tend to explain their symptoms more thoroughly than men. "We need patients to describe what they're feeling in plenty of detail," he explains, "so we can tell what's going on."



Connect with a Cardiologist

For a referral to a cardiologist on the medical staff at Baylor Dallas or Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital, call **1-800-4BAYLOR** or visit **FindDrRight.com**.



Get in Tune

Visit **BaylorHealth.com/DallasHeart** to learn more about abnormal heart rhythms and to watch our segment about the topic from *Good Morning Texas*.

BE A WISE WOMAN: ASK QUESTIONS

If you've been diagnosed with a heart condition, you probably have a lot of questions. And that's a good thing, as long as you ask them.

Remember, your cardiologist is an expert in the treatment of heart conditions, and he or she can provide information on treatment, care and further prevention.

Here are some of the key questions you should ask:

- Is there a name for my medical condition?
- Is my heart condition genetic or is it a result of my lifestyle choices?
- How severe is my heart condition?
- Is there a cure?
- What type of complications might I experience?
- Will changes in diet and exercise help my condition?
- Is it safe for me to exercise?
- What symptoms should prompt me to call an ambulance?
- Can my heart condition be controlled with medication?
- Where can I find more information about my heart condition?

If you still have questions after your visit, call your cardiologist's office and ask to speak to a nurse or schedule a follow-up appointment.



Save the Date

**Teatime for Women's Health,
Friday, Nov. 4, 2011, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

Join Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital for a lunchtime tea in Rosine Hall at the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden to learn more about women's health and your risk of heart disease. Parking and entrance fees to the garden are waived for event attendees. To register or find out more, call **1-800-4BAYLOR**.

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