

Angela Bassett puts the spotlight on heart health

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Angela Bassett and her Uncle Ralph

(HealthDay)—Actress Angela Bassett has graced film and TV screens

with a wide range of award-winning performances for decades.

But her latest role is that of spokeswoman, raising awareness of links between type 2 [diabetes](#) and [heart disease](#).

Unfortunately, it's an issue Bassett understands only too well.

"I got involved with this movement because of my mom—to honor her," Bassett said. "She had type 2 diabetes and three years ago she died from [heart](#) disease."

Bassett's mother, Betty Jane Bassett, passed away in 2014 at the age of 78.

"Until that time, I know I was pretty unaware of the connection between type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease," Bassett admitted.

And although her mother's particular situation was complicated, Bassett believes that knowing about that risk and having the opportunity to make potentially helpful lifestyle changes "would have made a big difference."

Currently, more than 29 million Americans have diabetes. Another 86 million adults have prediabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association.

Dr. Gregg Fonarow is co-director of UCLA's preventative cardiology program and co-chief of the division of cardiology. He said that "diabetes is strongly linked to [cardiovascular disease](#)."

In fact, heart disease "remains the leading cause of death and disability in men and women with type 2 diabetes," Fonarow said. Adults with diabetes face a two to four times greater risk of dying from heart disease than people without diabetes, according to the American Heart

Association (AHA).

But medical experts behind the new "For Your SweetHeart" initiative—which kicks off Tuesday—warn that recent surveys have indicated that more than half of adults with diabetes are unaware of their [heart disease risk](#).

The current initiative—which is sponsored by the pharmaceutical companies Boehringer Ingelheim and Eli Lilly and Company—highlights that point through an information website (ForYourSweetHeart.com).

The site offers instructional videos, a downloadable health-care provider discussion sheet, and a "Heart You Quiz" on the diabetes-cardiovascular connection.

And that connection is substantial, Fonarow said. Type 2 diabetes increases the likelihood of a heart attack or stroke, developing [peripheral blood vessel disease](#), and premature cardiovascular death. It also raises the risk for heart failure by 200 percent to 800 percent, he explained.

Why? According to the AHA, diabetes and heart disease share many of the same underlying drivers, including: high blood pressure; high levels of both "bad" (LDL) cholesterol and fats known as triglycerides; being overweight or obese; and being sedentary.

"Fortunately, there are a number of proactive steps patients with type 2 diabetes can undertake to substantially reduce their cardiovascular risk," Fonarow said.

"These include maintaining healthy cholesterol, blood pressure, weight and blood sugar levels, and engaging in daily physical activity," he advised.

The AHA recommends that people with diabetes adopt a moderate aerobic regimen amounting to at least 150 minutes per week. Alternatively, patients could opt for 75 minutes per week of vigorous activity.

And on top of aerobics, the AHA advises a minimum of two sessions per week of moderate- to high-intensity strength-training as well.

The American Diabetes Association also recommends that people limit sedentary time. The diabetes association says that people should get up and move around for a few minutes for every 30 minutes you've been sitting. They suggest setting an alarm to remind you to get up and move.

"There are also cardiovascular protective medications," said Fonarow, "like aspirin, statins and angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors. Certain diabetes medications may also help protect the heart."

The bottom-line, he added, is that "it is vital for all patients with diabetes—in consultation with their physician—to develop and stick with a healthy heart plan to curtail the looming risks."

Meanwhile, Bassett said she stays on top of her health. Her doctors "have told me that if I did not, I would have a prediabetic disposition as well. So I have an awareness for it," she said.

"And it's still an issue very close to my heart because my mom's eldest brother, my Uncle Ralph, also has diabetes," she said.

"But he's now at the Y every day, he manages his diet in a way that helps, and he's on his medication and sees his health professional. He's very conscientious about that. He's aware, and that's the first step. Being aware," Bassett added.

Bassett earned Emmy Award nominations for her portrayal of civil rights icon Rosa Parks in "The Rosa Parks Story" and for her colorful characterizations on the series "American Horror Story." She also won a Golden Globe and an Academy Award nomination for her portrayal of legendary singer Tina Turner in "What's Love Got to Do With It."

More information: Angela Bassett, actress; Gregg Fonarow, M.D., director, Ahmanson-UCLA Cardiomyopathy Center, co-director, preventative cardiology program, co-chief, division of cardiology, University of California, Los Angeles; May 2017, "For Your SweetHeart: Where Diabetes and Heart Disease Meet" campaign

There's more on the link between diabetes and heart disease at the [American Heart Association](#).

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