

New initiative aims to reduce repeat heart attacks

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Every 42 seconds someone in the U.S. has a heart attack. Just after noon on March 26, 2016, Julie Kubala, became one of those statistics. She's working now to ensure she doesn't become a different one – about 21 percent of women and 17 percent of men age 45 and older will have another heart attack within five years of their first one.

To help Kubala and others like her, the American Heart Association has launched a new educational campaign aimed at reducing the number of repeat or recurrent heart attacks. The plan is to arm survivors with a few simple, but effective action steps that can lower their risk of having another heart attack.

"Our message is simple: don't wait for a second heart attack," said Alice Jacobs, M.D., former AHA president and chair of the advisory group overseeing the new initiative. "Research shows there are some very clear things you can do to lower your chances of having another event."

- Take medication as directed—More than a third of heart disease patients don't follow their medication treatment plans; more than a third of medication-related hospital readmissions are caused by people not taking their medicine as they should.
- Have a follow-up doctor's appointment—Heart attack survivors who don't have a timely follow-up with their doctor may be up to 10 times more likely to be rehospitalized.
- Complete a cardiac rehabilitation program—One study found that heart patients who completed [cardiac rehab](#) were 42 percent less likely to die than those who did not.
- Manage risk factors—Reducing risk factors like physical inactivity, high blood pressure, [high blood cholesterol](#), diabetes, smoking, and obesity lowers the chance of having a heart attack or needing heart surgery.

- Develop a strong support system—People with low perceived social support have worse outcomes after a heart attack, including higher likelihood of death or other cardiac events.

Kubala, 48, of Superior, Wisconsin, is only four months out from her heart attack. She goes to cardiac rehab and is learning the importance of being proactive to take control of her health.

"I knew my family history of [high blood pressure](#), high cholesterol, diabetes. What hadn't really hit me was our family history of heart disease, or how all of that can be related," she said. "I couldn't see the forest for the trees. Now I'm determined to do all I can to get healthy and to stay healthy, but it's not easy to keep on top of everything."

Jacobs, Professor of Medicine and Vice Chair for Clinical Affairs in the Department of Medicine at Boston University Medical Center, said making it easier for patients and their healthcare providers to know, understand and follow research-based clinical guidelines is a key element of the association's Guidelines Transformation and Optimization initiative, under which the new heart attack campaign falls.

"Having a heart attack can obviously be very traumatic, and afterwards patients and families can have a difficult time processing all that has happened, and all that needs to happen to get better," Jacobs said. "All the questions to answer, the instructions to remember and the medical terms to understand can be overwhelming. We want to help by providing simple, easy to follow steps, easy to use tools and trackers that can help people not just recover fully from this [heart attack](#), but prevent a future one."

Information and tools for patients, their families and their healthcare teams will be developed and rolled out over the next year at

[Heart.org/HeartAttackRecovery](https://www.heart.org/HeartAttackRecovery).

Provided by American Heart Association

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