



# significant living

celebrating life & faith after 50

Pamela Christian

surviving sudden cardiac arrest . . .  
what she learned may save your  
life, too! plus: heart-healthy recipes

Terry Bradshaw

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the hard things in life

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what every caregiver  
needs to know

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financial and legal  
planning for ages 40+

bless your





# heart

By Pamela Christian

A morning of fun with friends suddenly turned into a near-death experience for a seemingly healthy 47-year-old. A miracle saved her life. What she learned might save yours, too.



(Above) A grateful Pamela with the EMTs who helped save her life. (Left to right) Paramedic Greg Brinkley, Pamela, Captain Sekins, and paramedic Jeff Pedersen.

*better late than never* may be true when you're showing up for a tennis date, but not when it comes to sudden cardiac arrest. I know because I experienced both the same day.

It was early on a chilly autumn morning in Southern California. I arrived last to play tennis with three women—two I'd never met and one our mutual friend who introduced us. Being late is not the best way to make a good first impression, which I desperately wanted to do so I could become a regular part of this foursome. I quickly took my place on the court to warm up. Debbie hit a ball to me and I returned it over the fence instead of the net! My second ball was just as bad, slamming into the net. My third ball veered over to Jill on the other side of the court where she was warming up with Terri. Not good. Not good at all. I could feel myself reacting, becoming very anxious. I thought this was because I was hoping to impress them with my skills.

After trying to hit a few more balls, I noticed I was very short of breath and much more hot and sweaty than I should have been for the amount of exertion. I announced that I needed to sit and catch my breath, which Debbie graciously allowed. After sitting a short while, my symptoms worsened. I told the girls that I really couldn't play, and I gathered my things, planning to drive home and call my doctor.

As I headed to my car, Terri followed me, offering to drive. By the time I reached the car, I was dizzy and nauseous and I threw up—right there in public. I was mortified. Terri wanted to call 911, but I resisted, not wanting to be any more of a spectacle than I'd already become. I did agree, however, to let her drive. I started to get into her car, an



immaculate sporty red two-seater, but I immediately got back out, knowing I was going to be sick again. Now very short of breath and also weak, all I could do was lie down on the cool, damp sidewalk.

By this time Jill and Debbie had come off the courts, and Terri was already on the phone with 911. I heard Debbie and Jill saying, "We need to call her husband," and off in the distance I could hear the sirens of the emergency vehicles. Jill held my legs according to the instructions from the dispatcher Terri had on the phone, while Debbie ran to flag down the emergency team.

I was grateful to know that the three women I was with were sisters in Christ who were also praying for me. Jill's prayer, however, took on the form of a song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Not the entire song, just the same phrase over and over. The stress of the moment caused her to forget the other words. Normally, I'd jump in and sing, too, but I had a refrain of my own—I repeated, "Oh Lord, Oh Lord, Oh Lord."

Six minutes and 21 seconds after Terri called 911, the EMTs arrived. Paramedic Jeff Pedersen grabbed my left arm and strapped it to something, while Greg Brinkley took my right arm and strapped it to something else, likely the EKG. Captain Sekins, I later learned, was busy writing down every change in my situation as it was called out.

I'm told that my symptoms progressed so fast that he could barely keep up documenting them. I'm also told that from the moment they arrived on the scene, they began administering advanced life support. Jeff administered 50 ccs of Lidocaine. After talking with the doctor by phone, he was instructed to administer another 50 ccs of Lidocaine. This was to get my heart regulated.

What they witnessed was my heart in an SVT, followed by a VT, followed by a VFib. If you're a medical professional, you know what that means. If not, understand that it was bad—really bad. My heart was beating in excess of 300 beats per minute. For someone my size on a good day of

playing tennis, my maximum heart beat would be around 185 beats per minute. With the advent of the VFib, my heart abruptly stopped. I was gone.

I'm told that the men really went to work now. They got out the zip scissors to cut through my clothing and get access to my chest. Debbie recognized this as a personal moment so she turned her back to the scene, while she continued to pray. She next heard the rustling of equipment, and then someone called out, "Clear!" Then she heard the sound of 200 joules of power being surged through my body. The next thing she heard was, "Bag her!" She told me she thought, *You can't do that . . . you can't give up on her now. You've hardly worked on her!* She whipped around to look, and she saw an oxygen bag on my face. She thought they were preparing to put me in a body bag.

I could hear my name being called. It was Greg Brinkley. "Pam, Pam are you with us? Pam come back." I could feel myself being drawn back into my body, and I opened my eyes. As my focus began to return, I saw the face of a black man kneeling over me with the sky and clouds beyond him and I thought, *Well, what do you know, Jesus is black.*

As I became more aware, I realized that it wasn't Jesus but Greg Brinkley, one of the guys He sent to help me. I also realized that a crowd of onlookers had gathered and sensed my chest was bare. My hands and arms were still strapped, so I couldn't take a modest pose of any kind. I asked, "Am I naked?" No one answered; they were busy preparing to get me in the ambulance. I asked again, "Am I naked?" Still no answer. I asked a third time, louder and clearly agitated. Finally, Greg Brinkley bent down, covered me up, and whispered, "Pam, if that's all we have to worry about, it has been a good day!"

While some people say, "Pam, I think God was trying to tell you to slow down," I sense He's telling me my job now is to be busy sharing with others just how fragile life is. It can be taken from us at any moment, so it's important that we're ready.





*(Opposite) Developing heart-healthy recipes is one of the many things that Pamela, who formerly owned a catering business, enjoys. She loves entertaining and says, "I've acquired the reputation for 'throwing events,' not just having parties."*

This experience has created a greater sense of urgency in me—not only to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, but also to help increase awareness about heart disease because it, not cancer, is the leading cause of death in America.

The doctors have never determined why I suffered sudden cardiac arrest. I was 47 years old and exercised regularly. I don't smoke; I'm not overweight or diabetic. I have none of the classic risk factors, and my test revealed no apparent cause, but I still suffered sudden cardiac arrest. It is also a miracle that I have no residual heart damage, despite the fact that my heart was beating in excess of 300 beats per minute.

I believe that was because the women I was with were Christians who immediately began prayer and after calling 911, they called the church prayer chain, so many were praying for me. Since only 5 percent of witnessed victims of sudden cardiac arrest survive, I know I am nothing short of a miracle. I died, but was revived.

The oft-quoted, "Bless your heart," has taken on a whole new meaning for

me. In fact, Bless Your Heart is the name of the heart-disease awareness campaign I founded to help people everywhere become aware.

There are many lifestyle choices we make that put us at risk for cardiovascular disease. What about you? What are your personal risk factors? If you have a family history that puts you at risk, there's only so much you can do. But if you are overweight, exposed to smoking, have out-of-control diabetes, improperly managed stress, and/or have a sedentary lifestyle, you are putting yourself at greater risk for cardiovascular disease—the leading cause of death for Americans, more than the next seven causes combined. Bless Your Heart is what you must do, for yourself and your loved ones, before it's too late.

*Pamela Christian is a national speaker, radio and television host, author, and accomplished home chef and recipe developer. To learn more, visit her website: [www.pamelachristianministries.com](http://www.pamelachristianministries.com) and [www.blessyourheartcampaign.com](http://www.blessyourheartcampaign.com).*

# heart-health basics

*what do you know* about cardiovascular disease? If you were told that it is the leading cause of death for Americans, claiming the lives of more than the next seven causes of death combined, you'd no doubt want to make a point of knowing as much as you can. Through awareness you could potentially save your own life or that of someone you love. Here's some key information that you should know.

The term "cardiovascular disease" (CVD) technically refers to any of the 20 or so diseases that affect the cardiovascular system. Usually it refers to those related to arterial disease.

Chances are that by your 50th birthday you've developed at least one of the risk factors, making you a potential candidate for CVD. A few of the things that place you at high risk include diabetes, high blood pressure, overweight or obesity, smoking, high cholesterol, or physical inactivity. The American Heart Association (AHA) has an online risk-assessment tool at [www.americanheart.org/preventer/jhtml?identifier=3003499](http://www.americanheart.org/preventer/jhtml?identifier=3003499).

According to the AHA, diabetes is one of the major cardiovascular risk factors. At least 65 percent of people with diabetes die from some type of cardiovascular disease. It is projected that diabetes prevalence will more than double between the years of 2005-2050—primarily because of the growing epidemic of obesity.

Of even greater concern is the fact the American Diabetes Association (ADA) estimates there are 20.8 million children and adults in the U.S. with diabetes—and nearly one-third of them (or 6.2 million people) do not know it!

According to the ADA, all of us should be screened at three-year intervals beginning at age 45, but people who are overweight or obese should consider annual screening. And, if multiple risk factors are present, screening should be done at an earlier age and more frequently. For example, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that adults with high blood pressure or high cholesterol be screened for diabetes annually in an effort to reduce cardiovascular disease. The ADA has an online tool to help you predict your or a loved one's diabetes risk at [www.diabetes.org/risk-test.jsp](http://www.diabetes.org/risk-test.jsp).

It's estimated that one in four adults have high blood pressure, which increases risks for CVD. Because high blood pressure usually causes no symptoms, the USPSTF recommends that all adults have their blood pressure measured annually.



## curry chicken & grape salad

*An Indian-inspired dish that's especially good for getting servings of fruits, vegetables, and protein into one salad. Makes approximately 4 servings.*

### ingredients

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 lb cooked boneless, skinless chicken breast meat, chopped (about 2 cups) | 1 Tbs. honey                                       |
| 2 stalks celery, sliced  | 1 Tbs. curry paste or powder                       |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup black seedless grapes, halved                            | $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. onion powder                    |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup green seedless grapes, halved                            | $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cumin powder (or more to taste) |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup light mayonnaise   | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro    |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup plain low-fat yogurt                                     | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup roasted, lightly salted cashews  |
|  | paprika (for garnish)                              |

### steps

- 1 If you're not using leftover chicken, in a microwave-safe bowl with a fitted lid, place the chicken half-breasts and microwave on medium-high (70% power) until done, about 15-20 minutes, rotating a few times to assure even cooking. Chicken is done when the center is no longer pink and the juices run clear. Set aside. When cool cut into fairly large chunks.
- 2 Place cut, cooked chicken in a large bowl. Add the sliced celery and grape halves.
- 3 Mix the mayonnaise, yogurt, honey, curry paste, onion powder and cumin and half of the chopped cilantro. Pour over chicken and toss to thoroughly coat. Transfer to serving plates.
- 4 Garnish with remaining chopped cilantro, paprika and cashews.



Are you at risk for cardiovascular disease? Learn the symptoms and what you can do to improve your health. Why not start with something as simple as heart-healthy eating?

Obesity is another a risk factor for CVD. For several decades, obesity has been rising in both adults and children. Currently, it is estimated that 66 percent of adults are overweight and 31.4 percent are obese.

Another risk factor is metabolic syndrome, also called insulin resistance syndrome. You have metabolic syndrome if at least three of the following are true:

- You are overweight or obese and you carry the weight around your middle. For men, this means a waist that measures greater than 40 inches around. For women, it means a waist that measures greater than 35 inches around.
- You have high blood pressure (130/80 mm Hg or greater).
- You have a high amount of sugar in your blood (a fasting blood sugar of 100 mg/dL or greater).
- You have a high amount of fat in your blood (a triglyceride level of 150 mg/dL or greater).
- You have low HDL cholesterol (the "good" cholesterol). For men, this means an HDL level less than 40 mg/dL. For women, this means an HDL level less than 50 mg/dL.

The more of these risk factors you have, the higher your risk of heart disease. Even if your cholesterol level is normal, you still may be at risk for a heart attack or stroke.

Other risk factors include improper nutrition, smoking, sleep deprivation, sedentary lifestyle, exposure to high levels of environmental noise, stress, rocky relationships, depression, and, believe it or not, periodontal disease. These risk factors are considered modifiable since they can be aided with proper attention.

Age, gender, race and genetics are also risk factors.

While CVD has long been considered a "man's disease," heart disease is the number one killer of women over the age of 25.

- One woman dies from heart attack or stroke every single minute in the U.S.
- About 6.6 million American women have heart disease.
- At menopause, a woman's heart-disease risk starts to rise significantly. One in four women over 65 has heart disease.



### *oven-baked salmon with green beans & mushrooms*

*A very easy, yet elegant, dinner; perfect for entertaining. Serve with roasted red potatoes. Makes 4 servings.*

#### **ingredients**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 10-oz package of fancy frozen green beans     | 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil                           |
| 1 8-oz package of fresh mushrooms               | Salt and pepper to taste                                |
| 1 4-oz can of black olives, pitted              | 4 8-oz thick-cut salmon fillets, with or without skin   |
| 1 cup cherry tomatoes                           | 1 2-oz can anchovy fillets, drained well                |
| 1 cup loosely packed fresh chopped basil leaves | $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sliced almonds                        |
| 2 lemons  | $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh Italian parsley, finely chopped |
| 2 cloves garlic, pressed                        |   |

#### **steps**

- 1 Preheat oven to 400°F.
- 2 In a large bowl combine the green beans, mushrooms, olives, cherry tomatoes, and chopped basil. Zest one lemon over the vegetables.
- 3 In a small bowl, juice both lemons then add the olive oil and garlic. Mix well, then pour over vegetables. Add salt and pepper to taste, and toss to evenly coat. Place along one side of deep-sided baking tray.
- 4 Place salmon fillets along other side of pan, skin-side down. Place anchovies over the vegetables. Bake in preheated oven approx. 15 minutes or until the fish is done and flakes with the touch of a fork.
- 5 Serve garnished with sliced almonds and fresh chopped parsley.



*oatmeal molasses cookies*

*Plan on baking these so your home is filled with the beckoning aroma when the family comes home. Makes about 4 dozen small cookies.*

**ingredients**

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 cup chopped pecans               | 1/2 cup shortening                                |
| 1 1/4 cup sifted all-purpose flour | 1/2 cup sugar*                                    |
| 1/2 tsp. baking soda               | 1/2 cup unsulphered molasses                      |
| 1/2 tsp. baking powder             | 2 eggs  |
| 1/2 tsp. salt                      | 1 1/2 cup quick oats, uncooked                    |
| 1 tsp. cinnamon                    | 1 cup chopped dried apricots or dried cranberries |
| 1/2 tsp. ginger                    |   |

**steps**

Preheat oven to 350°F.

- 1 Place chopped pecans in a baking pan and toast in the oven to a medium brown, about 4 minutes; cool.
- 2 Combine the flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, and ginger in a bowl and set aside.
- 3 Cream together the shortening and sugar. Add the eggs one at a time, thoroughly mixing after each addition. Add the oats, flour mixture, dried apricots, and toasted pecans, and mix until just blended.
- 4 Drop by heaping tablespoons onto ungreased cookie sheet and bake for approximately 12 minutes or until nice golden brown.

\* Try using non-calorie sugar substitute that measures the same as sugar for a more figure-friendly version.

- In a survey by the American Heart Association, 63 percent of women named breast cancer as their greatest health risk (nine times as many who named heart disease as their greatest risk).
- Heart disease claims twice as many women's lives as all forms of cancer combined, including breast cancer. Whereas about one in 30 women die of breast cancer, more than one in two die from heart attack or stroke. (More than 10 times the number of breast cancer deaths.)
- Every year since 1984, more women than men have died of heart disease.
- Sixty percent of women who die suddenly from coronary heart disease have no previous symptoms.
- For years, heart disease has been considered a man's disease, but postmenopausal women are just as likely to develop heart disease as men. And when they do have a heart attack or stroke, it's more likely to be fatal in women.

CVD is a particularly important problem among minority women. Statistics indicate that the death rate due to CVD is substantially higher in African-American women than women of other races.

**Life-Saving Information**

Have you learned something here? Great, that's the idea. But let's test your knowledge to help you get prepared about what you can do to save a life—perhaps even your own.

**What are the differences between a heart attack, sudden cardiac arrest, and stroke?**

A heart attack is an event caused by a clog that obstructs blood flow to the heart muscle. Sudden cardiac arrest is an event in which the heart abruptly stops. A stroke is a condition that obstructs the flow of blood to the brain.

**What are some warning signs that you should watch for?**

Warning signs differ with each specific disease and vary from person to person. Not all these signs occur in every situation; sometimes they come then go away and return. Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, leaving no doubt as to what's happening, but most start slowly with mild pain or discomfort. Sometimes these are so mild that people choose to wait the symptoms out, expecting them to subside.

Heart attack symptoms include chest discomfort and discomfort in other areas of the upper body, shortness of breath, cold sweat, nausea, or light-headedness.

Some heart attacks can lead to cardiac arrest. However, women are less likely to notice they have a heart problem. Why? Many symptoms of heart disease in women may mimic other conditions, such as acid reflux, fatigue, or depression. And women with heart disease often have symptoms different from men; instead of chest pain or pressure, for example, they may report shortness of breath, fatigue, indigestion, and anxiety. Further complicating the issue is the fact that EKGs, exercise stress tests, and other diagnostics are often less reliable or testing women.

Stroke warning signs may include sudden numbness or weakness of the face,



arm or leg, especially on one side of the body; sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding; sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes; sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

Cardiac arrest symptoms may include sudden loss of responsiveness, no response to gentle shaking; no normal breathing, (the victim does not take a normal breath when you check for several seconds); no signs of circulation; no movement or coughing. Sudden cardiac arrest can strike immediately and without warning.

**What's the best course of action should you or someone you're near demonstrate symptoms of CVD?**

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, along with the American Heart Association, launched the "Act In Time" campaign, emphasizing the importance of calling 911 immediately.

Sudden cardiac arrest, heart attack, and stroke are life-and-death emergencies, so every second counts. The best course of action is to call 911 and wait for their arrival. It's estimated that up to 95 percent of victims die en route to the hospital because they attempt to go there on their own without medical help.

Today's heart and stroke victims can benefit from new medications and treatments that were previously unavailable, but to be effective, these treatments need to be administered quickly after any symptoms appear. Don't delay! Call 911. And in the case of sudden cardiac arrest, begin CPR immediately. If an automated external defibrillator (AED) is available, tell the 911 dispatcher and then follow their instructions. Again, every second counts.

**What preventions can you take to reduce risk?**

Examine your lifestyle and make necessary changes to reduce your risk where you can. Eat right, exercise, don't smoke or use recreational drugs, reduce stress, control your blood pressure, diabetes, and/or weight. Do what you can to manage depression, and get the help of a professional for any area that's difficult.

Learn your family medical history. Have your doctor complete a thorough examination in order to know what you can't see but need to know about. Become informed, and help others become aware. You really could help save a life.



### *chicken pita sandwiches with garlic yogurt sauce*

*This Middle Eastern-inspired sandwich is easy to make but delightfully complex in flavor. Consider doubling the yogurt sauce to be extra generous with the servings. Makes approximately 16 half-pita sandwiches.*

#### **ingredients**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1/2 cup fresh lemon juice</li><li>1 tsp. ground turmeric</li><li>1/2 tsp. ground cumin</li><li>1/2 tsp. ground allspice</li><li>1/2 tsp. onion powder</li><li>1 1/2 tsp. olive oil</li><li>1/2 tsp. ground cardamom</li><li>1/2 tsp. salt</li><li>1/2 tsp. pepper</li><li>3 cloves garlic, minced</li><li>2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts</li><li>1 large cucumber thinly sliced</li><li>1 Tbs. minced fresh mint</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 medium sweet white onion, thinly sliced and separated into rings</li><li>8 oz plain low-fat yogurt</li><li>1/4 tsp. salt</li><li>1/4 tsp. white pepper</li><li>1/4 tsp. garlic powder, to taste</li><li>cooking spray</li><li>8 6-inch whole-wheat pita bread rounds cut in half</li><li>1 cup thinly sliced (shredded) iceberg lettuce</li><li>1 cup thinly sliced white onion</li><li>1 cup fresh chopped tomato</li></ul> |
|---|--|

#### **steps**

- 1 Mix the lemon, turmeric, cumin, allspice, onion powder, oil, cardamom, salt, pepper, garlic and chicken in a large plastic zip-style bag; seal and shake well to coat. Marinate in the refrigerator at least 8 hours, turning occasionally.
- 2 In a glass mixing bowl, combine cucumber, mint, onion rings, yogurt, salt, pepper, and garlic powder. Taste and adjust seasonings, cover and chill at least 8 hours.
- 3 Prepare coals/preheat the grill. Spray the grill with cooking spray. Remove chicken from bag reserving marinade to baste while grilling.
- 4 Grill chicken over moderate heat about 8-10 minutes on each side depending upon thickness, or until done; occasionally brush with additional marinade up to the last 10 minutes of cook time. Remove cooked chicken from grill and allow to cool for 15 minutes to absorb internal juices. Discard unused marinade. After 15 minutes, slice chicken into thin strips.
- 5 Stuff each pita half with lettuce, sliced onion, and tomatoes. Add chicken and generous dollops of the garlic yogurt sauce and serve.