Dottie Brimeyer shares her experience with minimally invasive heart surgery

Learn how much exercise you really should be getting
Welcome

A Letter from the President

The very first person to lead this great organization was Sister Mary Agatha Murphy, RSM, who helped to establish St. Joseph’s Mercy Hospital on the corner of 3rd and Bluff Streets in 1879 and served for 15 years in the role (the longest continuous tenure until Rusty Knight’s service from 1997 to 2015.) Sister Mary Agatha was followed by 17 different Sisters of Mercy before Sister Helen Huewe, OSF, took the post in 1986. What a blessing to have had Sister Helen as our leader for 11 years until she retired in 1997. She was a great friend to many of us, until her passing at 84 years of age this past January.

Sister Helen, who had previously been the leader of the Xavier Hospital in Dubuque, played a key role in the merger of Xavier and Mercy hospitals in 1981. She later became president/CEO of Mercy Medical Center and, predictably, initiated mission-centered programs like the Mercy Maternal Health Clinic, which has provided perinatal care to women and families, regardless of their ability to pay, for almost 30 years.

In her retirement, Sister Helen was a zealot in serving the underserved. She was well known for ‘not taking no for an answer’ and, as time went on, people were just instantly with her at ‘yes’. If Sister Helen was involved in a project, you knew it was going to get done. She was highly respected for her passionate commitment to care for vulnerable populations, and rolled up her sleeves to make a meaningful difference in the lives of so many. She lived our mission, the mission of the Sisters of St. Francis, and her personal mission in such a courageous and inspiring way.

I didn’t really get to know Sister Helen until after she left Mercy. When I became president (the 27th in our history), we met on numerous occasions and she frequently called me with a question, an opinion or some great insight or advice, which I loved. Sister Helen was a wonderful mentor and always encouraging. She was excited about the new cancer center, proudly signing the beam and attending many sessions to check on our progress and to offer her support. I’ll never forget our last conversation when, with a twinkle in her eye, she told me to “get that cancer center built.” Sister Helen, like her fellow sisters, was about doing the right thing (and not holding back.) She was a remarkable woman, a relentless advocate, a champion for the less fortunate, ... a kind heart.

We are so grateful for all that Sister Helen and the Sisters of St. Francis have done for the Dubuque community through the years, especially their commitment to stand with persons who are poor. And while we are sad this world will no longer be graced by Sister Helen’s physical presence, we know that her goodness, her selfless service, and her positive impact will be felt for many, many years to come. St. Francis of Assisi said, “Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received – only what you have given: a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.” Well done, Sister Helen. We will miss you.
How much exercise do I really need?

Regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your health. But, according to the American Heart Association, only about one in five adults and teens gets enough exercise to maintain good health.

So, how much is enough?

Here are recommendations for an average adult:

- At least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity)

PLUS

- Moderate- to high-intensity muscle-strengthening activity (such as resistance or weights) on at least two days per week

Here are some examples to get you started.

Moderate-intensity exercises:

- Brisk walking
- Biking
- Elliptical machine
- Fast dancing
- Gardening
- Golfing, without a cart
- Housework, such as vacuuming
- Jogging
- Mowing the lawn with a push mower
- Shooting baskets
- Volleyball
- Water walking

The key is to find something that YOU enjoy doing and that works for your fitness level. Even if you’re nowhere near 150 minutes a week, or you’re new to exercise, just start moving. Gradually increase your time. And remember to speak with your physician before starting an exercise program.

When Dottie Brimeyer was referred to a cardiologist and diagnosed with mild aortic stenosis, she was shocked. She hadn’t noticed any problems, and what she did notice, like reduced energy, she simply chalked up to aging.

“You just get used to your body, and I was 72 years old. There should be problems,” Dottie said with a laugh.

Diagnosing aortic stenosis before symptoms develop is ideal. Aortic stenosis is a progressive disease that keeps the aortic heart valve from opening and closing properly. The heart must work harder to push blood through the valve. Eventually the heart weakens, increasing the risk of serious heart complications.

Also, not only does aortic stenosis cause a heart problem, but it also causes problems for the rest of the body because the body is being starved of essential blood and oxygen.

Dottie's cardiologist informed her that she would need treatment when the stenosis worsened, and he continued monitoring her progression.

In 2018, Dottie's husband, Ken, started experiencing some concerning symptoms. He found himself taking breaks while doing normal tasks, such as cutting the grass. Like Dottie, he attributed these changes to aging. But then when he couldn’t sleep one night and struggled to breathe, he went to MercyOne’s emergency department.

Ken was admitted and diagnosed with severe aortic stenosis in July 2018 and needed valve replacement surgery. He had never had any prior heart problems.

Ken met with Medical Associates cardiologist Rami Eltibi, MD, and cardiothoracic surgeon Lance Bezzina, DO, to learn about his condition and treatment plan.

“They are so thorough and explained the whole process all the way through,” Ken recalls.

It was important that Ken have surgery as soon as possible.

“When the disease enters the severe range, there’s a risk of sudden death, heart attack or stroke,” explains Dr. Eltibi. “That first event might be too late. That’s one reason why receiving primary care is so important. A primary care provider can detect problems with a heart valve early, before it becomes an emergent situation.”

That was the case with Dottie. Her provider detected a heart murmur, which led to her early diagnosis.
Around a year after Ken’s valve replacement surgery, Dottie’s symptoms increased. “The kids were telling me, ‘Grandma your breathing is terrible. You’re wheezing.’ I went downhill really fast,” she recalls.

It was time to do something. Her cardiologist, however, referred her for treatment in Cedar Rapids.

“I really didn’t want to go out of town,” stated Dottie. She was relieved to learn that she didn’t have to, and Dottie transferred her care to Dr. Eltibi.

Medical Associates Clinic and MercyOne now offer a less-invasive procedure for aortic stenosis. Transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) is an option for people with severe aortic stenosis. TAVR is a less-invasive approach to aortic valve replacement than open heart surgery. With TAVR, the physician will make a small incision, usually in your groin. A thin, flexible tube is inserted into the artery to guide the new valve up to your heart, and the valve is expanded into place. Your old valve is not removed. Instead, the new valve is placed next to the old valve, essentially pushing the old valve out of the way, and takes over the job of regulating blood flow.

“Open heart surgery and TAVR both have great outcomes, but the recovery time for TAVR is much quicker,” explained Dr. Eltibi. “Our TAVR team meets to discuss each patient and determine which procedure is most appropriate for the patient.”

In addition to Drs. Bezzina and Eltibi, the TAVR team also includes cardiothoracic surgeon Stephanie Helmer, MD, and cardiologist RS Ramabadran, MD.

Dottie had her TAVR procedure in November 2019. “I could feel a difference right away,” said Dottie. “People are commenting on how good my color is now. It must have really been bad. And now I realize how little energy I really had.”

Although Ken also had wonderful results, he acknowledges that his recovery was slow in comparison to Dottie’s recovery. “I was barely walking more than around the block after two months but Dottie was back to her normal routine by then. It took me a year to really get back to normal,” said Ken. “I’m glad that TAVR is now being offered here.”

Symptoms of Aortic Stenosis

Early stages of aortic stenosis often have no outward symptoms. As the disease progresses, symptoms are sometimes mistaken by patients as normal signs of aging.

Symptoms may include:
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Difficulty walking short distances
- Lightheadedness, dizziness and fainting
- Swollen ankles and feet
- Rapid heartbeat
- Chest pain
- No longer taking part in physical activities you used to enjoy

For more information about TAVR, call 563-589-8187.

Ken Brimeyer walks the track at MercyOne’s wellness center during Dottie’s cardiac rehab session.
MercyOne Dyersville adds CT services

MercyOne Dyersville is has expanded its radiology services to include CT services. A computed tomography (CT) scan combines x-rays and computer technology to make a clear picture of the organs, bones and tissues inside your body. It offers more detail than a standard x-ray.

MercyOne Dyersville offers a wide variety of CT services including scanning the head, body, chest and extremities. Built around a new mobile workflow, Dyersville’s state-of-the-art CT scanner utilizes handheld tablet/remote technology to help staff spend more time in the room with patients during their exam.

“We are excited to provide this service for the community,” said Amy Phelps, director of MercyOne Dyersville. “Time is critical in events such as a stroke, so having the technology here in Dyersville will save time and lives.”

The addition of the CT scanner was well supported by the community. Through the fundraising efforts of the Dyersville Health Foundation, over $150,000 was raised for the purchase of the scanner.

Remember, Cardiac rehab is available at MercyOne Dyersville

We hope that you never have a need for cardiac rehab, but if you do, know that, in addition to MercyOne Dubuque, the program is also conveniently located at MercyOne Dyersville.

Cardiac rehab is an important part of the recovery process following a heart event. It’s a medically-monitored exercise and education program to get you back to living your best life.

“It’s not always easy, but cardiac rehab is one of the best things you can do for your heart,” said Elaine Thier, cardiac rehab coordinator. “Participating in the program can help you take control of your health and can even help prevent a second heart event from occurring.”

For more information about cardiac rehab at MercyOne Dyersville, call 563-875-5470.

Second full-time nurse practitioner joins MercyOne Dyersville

Chelsea Christensen, ARNP, joined the staff at MercyOne Dyersville. Chelsea is the second full-time, MercyOne-employed provider to join the Dyersville team since August 2019. The addition will allow MercyOne Dyersville to take on more complex patients and increase provider availability for emergency and in-patient care. Chelsea is primarily focused on the emergency department at this time, but she is also seeing inpatients on the skilled nursing unit.

“I look forward to getting to know the community and providing excellent patient centered care for MercyOne patients,” said Chelsea.

Chelsea graduated from Walden University with a Master’s of Science – Nursing Family Nurse Practitioner (MSN-FNP) degree and is licensed through the Iowa Board of Nursing. Her prior experience includes working as a registered nurse for 15 years with a wide background of experience in intensive care, orthopedics, oncology, med/surg/peds and family practice.
The construction of the MercyOne Dubuque Cancer Center continues to be on schedule for opening in late spring. The mild first half of winter has allowed the external work to continue, with the honed limestone and weathered zinc exterior finishing being applied in January. The windows have enclosed the building, allowing it to be heated so that the interior work can continue throughout the winter. Most of the drywall has been installed, and the wiring continues. The terrazzo flooring installation will be completed by mid-February. A unique radiation shielding product has been installed, which occupies a fraction of the space that concrete would occupy to provide the same level of shielding. This saved enough space to allow the creation of another vault that will house a PET/CT unit.

Work is also being done to develop new programs that will further the goal of delivering comprehensive cancer services. Programs in integrative medicine, psychosocial services, genetics counseling and support groups are just a few of the many programs that are under development.

Staff are currently being hired to fill the positions that are needed in the new radiation oncology service. Dr. Edward Miles has been hired as the medical director to lead the radiation oncology program. Dr. Miles has extensive experience in radiation program development and has worked in community oncology practices for many years. Dr. Cheryl Morgan-Ihrig has also been hired to join the medical oncology group at Medical Associates. Dr. Morgan-Ihrig also has extensive oncology experience, having worked 26 years at a community cancer center in Indiana. We welcome them both to our community and to MercyOne.

**Energy Bites**

**Ingredients**
- 1 cup quick oats
- ⅔ cup natural creamy peanut butter
- 2 tablespoons ground flaxseed
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- ¼ cup water
- ¼ cup mini chocolate chips
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- ¼ cup 100% pure maple syrup

**Directions**
1. Stir all ingredients together in a large bowl until evenly combined.
2. Shape into small one-inch bites.
3. Enjoy immediately or store in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

**Yield:** 20–25 energy bites  
**Serving size:** 2

Prepare energy bites in bulk so you always have a healthy snack on hand. They freeze great and can stay in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.
The heart care you need, right here.

Energy Bites

“The focus this month is on heart health. These powerful energy bites pack many heart healthy benefits into one small bite. The omega-3 fatty acids in chia seeds and flaxseeds have been linked to a number of health benefits, such as fighting inflammation, lowering triglycerides and supporting healthy cholesterol levels. Energy bites are great when meal prepping or preparing foods in bulk, as they freeze great and make a wonderful snack throughout the day!”

— Stacy Huss, RD, LD

Nutrition information (per serving):
202 calories, 22g carbohydrates, 6g protein,
2g saturated fat, 4g added sugar,
4g fiber, 56mg sodium