

Cover Story

IGNORING THE SIGNS

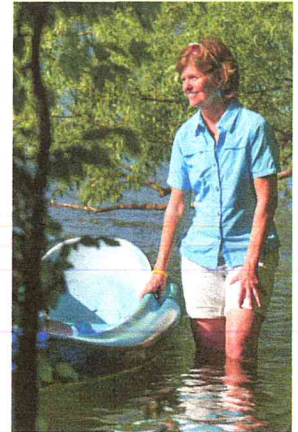


Becky Magura Barely Missed Having a Heart Attack

GENES CAN INCREASE RISK IN EVEN THE LEAST LIKELY CANDIDATES

Becky Magura was about the last person anyone would have expected to have heart disease. A petite woman in her 50s, this CEO and general manager of local PBS station WCTE-TV routinely ran 12 to 15 miles a week, ate a vegetable-rich diet and often skipped meat, and had normal cholesterol and blood pressure.

Yet, when she started running again after a stress fracture forced her to take some time off, something seemed different. She felt very tired, was short of breath and had some chest pain. But she didn't let that stop her from running in a 5K race while at a PBS meeting in Miami, where the symptoms grew even worse.



"My chest started killing me, but I thought, 'I am not stopping,'" said Magura, who believes the only thing that saved her that day was running over a loose board that caused her to hurt her ankle so that she had to stop.

Each time she tried to run after she came home, her symptoms would reappear. When her jaw started hurting, too, she called her primary care doctor, who immediately scheduled Magura for a stress test, which she failed. Then an arteriogram revealed an 80-percent blockage in her left anterior descending artery, dubbed the "widowmaker," and she was given a stent.

"She's a picture of health and has been taking good care of herself, so I was quite surprised that she had some heart blockage," said Dr. Stacy Brewington, a cardiologist with Tennessee Heart. "I think it just highlights the fact that anyone can get coronary artery disease (CAD), and we tend to forget that."

Dr. Brewington referred Magura to a preventive cardiologist, who found that Magura had a very high lipoprotein(a) level, an inherited disorder that places one at a greatly increased risk of having a heart attack.

"I knew my dad and his brothers had died of heart attacks, but they were guys, so I thought that because I didn't eat meat every day and was active, I could bypass all of that," said Magura.

To manage her condition, Magura is continuing in cardiac rehab, ramping up her exercise routine to include at least an hour of exercise each day, and further modifying her diet.

"I'll be honest, the reason I didn't get help in the beginning was that I thought, 'I'll get over there and it will be indigestion, and I'll feel stupid,'" said Magura. "But you can't do that. It's better for you to go and it be nothing and be happy that it's nothing, than to not go and die of a heart attack."

(Opposite page) Becky Magura

(Left) Becky Magura talks with her cardiologist, Dr. Stacy Brewington, in the cardiac rehab area at Tennessee Heart.

(Right) Becky Magura enjoys kayaking at Cane Creek Park.