



GO RED FOR WOMEN BETTERU CHALLENGE

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION, SEATTLE DIVISION

Million Hearts in Action

[Strategies for Achieving Million Hearts Goals]



Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 health threat for women. In the U.S., one in three women will die of cardiovascular disease. Yet research shows even small changes can result in big improvements that put women on the path to healthier hearts and better, longer lives. That's why the American Heart Association created the Go Red for Women BetterU Challenge, a program to inspire and empower women to take charge of their heart health. The BetterU Challenge delivers the resources and support women need to start living heart-healthy.

[Fast Facts]

- Heart disease and stroke kill one in three women.
- The BetterU Challenge is a 12-week program to help women live a more heart-healthy life.

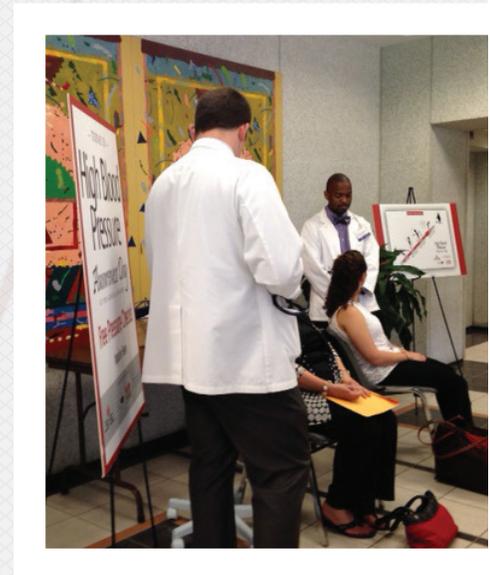


**"I didn't celebrate the amount of weight I lost,
I celebrated the years I gained."**

- BetterU Challenge participant

[What We Did]

- Offer a free 12-week heart-health makeover. Every Tuesday evening in spring 2014, 50 women from the Seattle area gathered to learn about heart health, healthy eating and exercise. The course included weekly lessons and activities that gave women the tools and motivation to make lifelong changes in their daily lives with the goal to bring blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar into a healthy range. Sessions included cholesterol and diabetes education, healthy cooking demonstrations, integrating fitness into a daily routine, stress management, a Zumba class and hands-only CPR education.
- Utilize trusted experts and resources. The program utilized informational materials from the American Heart Association and more than a half-dozen health experts, including a cardiologist, nurse, dietitian, life consultant and fitness instructor.
- Monitor progress. Participants received baseline and 12-week medical readings and completed questionnaires to assess their progress. Participants also had the opportunity to check their blood pressure at each weekly meeting.



[What We Accomplished]

Overall, participants lowered their blood pressure, reduced sodium intake, increased physical activity and ate more fruits and vegetables. Outcomes of the program include:

- 60% increase in the average time spent exercising each week
- 39% increase in fruit and vegetable intake
- 45% improvement in limiting sodium to 1,500 milligrams per day
- 25-point reduction in average total cholesterol (several women reduced total cholesterol by more than 50 points)
- Reduced systolic blood pressure (the top number) by an average 4.5 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) and diastolic blood pressure (the lower number) by an average 6.2 mm Hg
- Average weight loss of 3.1 pounds (two women lost nearly 20 pounds)
- Anecdotal evidence of participants sharing what they learned with family

“This program gave me the tools and motivation to change my behavior for the rest of my life. I made it about me and I know I can now pass the information on to others.”

- BetterU Challenge participant

[What We Learned]

For organizations interested in creating a similar program, the American Heart Association Seattle division recommends:

- Having the same meeting facilitator each week. Choose a person the participants can relate to, such as someone who has overcome previous struggles with high blood pressure, diabetes or elevated cholesterol.
- Sending meeting reminders by email and regular mail to minimize dropout. To encourage participation, organizers also emailed a weekly meeting summary that included a preview of the following week's activity.
- Scheduling the weekly meetings for 90 minutes.
- Recruiting ethnically diverse community members to spread the word about the program. For example, BetterU Challenge organizers recruited a past participant who is African-American. She partnered with a member of the local diversity council to publicize the program at minority conferences and on a local radio program.



[What We Are Doing Now]

BetterU Challenge organizers recently set up a private Facebook page to allow participants to continue supporting and encouraging each other. Participants say it is also an opportunity to hold each other accountable, ensuring they all stick with the lifestyle changes they have made.

To keep the program's momentum going, organizers are piloting a 10-week text and email program. They are sending three text or email messages per week. One text reads: "Sunday is a great day to do your meal planning for the week! Make healthy snacks and meals today ahead of time for healthy eating success!" After 10 weeks, participants will complete an evaluation to assess whether the program kept them motivated.

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