

By Christina Elston

Don't Miss a Beat

Kathy Magliato and a 35-year-old named Cristin technically never met, but the thin and lovely blonde made an impression on Magliato anyway. Cristin arrived at Providence Saint John's Health Center direct from the treadmill at a Santa Monica gym in full cardiac arrest. She died.

In her 2010 book "Heart Matters: A Memoir of a Female Heart Surgeon," Magliato, a cardiothoracic surgeon on staff at Saint John's, shares Cristin's story to convince women to take better care of their hearts.

"Almost every woman we see with heart disease, we can pinpoint some element of prevention that she missed," says the Pacific Palisades mom of two of this indiscriminate killer. "It doesn't affect old women, it affects all women."

Magliato says women need to build on the lessons of breast cancer – which now kills just 4 percent of women, while heart disease kills 40 percent. We all go out and get our mammograms, she says, and should pay the same attention to our hearts that we pay to our breasts.

To start, you'll need to know your total cholesterol, HCL cholesterol and blood pressure. If you don't, see your doctor (even your gynecologist). Next, download the ASCVD Risk Calculator app from the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association (Magliato is past president) and plug in your numbers.

Heart-disease risk factors include smoking (even as little as a cigarette a day), diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and a sedentary lifestyle, stress, cholesterol level, age and family history. Of those eight factors, only two – age and family history – are beyond your control. "It's about figuring out where your risk is and what you can change in your life," Magliato says.

But Magliato worries that many women, especially young moms, aren't making these changes. "We are so busy taking care of our children and our families that we don't take care of ourselves," she says. She wrote her book, which has now inspired an NBC television series called "Heartbeat," as



PHOTOS COURTESY KATHY MAGLIATO, M.D.

Cardiothoracic surgeon Kathy Magliato, M.D., with son Gabriel who was 3 at the time, wrote a memoir as a way to help women take better care of their hearts.

another way to impact women's health "beyond cutting into one or two women a day."

To improve her own health, Magliato has started doing something she had neglected for years. "The one thing that I have done in the last year to improve my health has been exercise," she says. "It was not easy." Her children are 10 and 12 years old, and her husband is a liver and pancreas surgeon at Cedars Sinai, so weekend time is precious. But she sat the family down and explained about the Saturday morning spin class she loves to take. "That hour and a half can buy me a lifetime with my children."

Another important message Magliato has for women is that they need to learn the symptoms of cardiac arrest – which don't include the type of chest-clutching pain you've seen on TV. "Fifty percent of women get no chest pain whatsoever," she says. Instead, look for "unusual fatigue" (something many women chalk up to just a part of daily life), often combined with shortness of breath.

Unexplained jaw pain, nausea and indigestion are other common symptoms.

Prevention, though, should keep you from getting to that point.

