



DENISE BACHMAN / OBSERVER-REPORTER

Chris Mabon of Mt. Lebanon, left, and Darvina Emmerich of Bridgeville display a blanket and a quilt that have been donated to Wrapped in Love Foundation Inc. for distribution to cancer patients and those with other serious illnesses.

# Spreading hope

## Widows embrace opportunity to help others heal

BY DENISE BACHMAN  
dbachman@observer-reporter.com

HEIDELBERG – To chat with Darvina Emmerich and Chris Mabon, one would think the South Hills women have been longtime friends.

But the two met just one year ago, developing an immediate friendship to honor their husbands' memories by spreading hope to cancer patients and others with serious illnesses through Wrapped in Love Foundation Inc., a nonprofit created by Emmerich.

Both women are widows, losing their husbands at a young age. Emmerich's husband, Jim, died on Valentine's Day 1997 following complications from cancer treatment, leaving behind his wife and two college-age daughters. He was 48.

Mabon's husband, Jeff, died on Christmas Eve 2006 from a heart attack (caused by an undetected heart defect) while cycling, leaving behind his wife and two teenage boys. He was 44.

"When you're faced with a situation you cannot change, you want to shrink," Mabon said. "But once you start expanding, you take action. ... When you take action of any kind, you heal yourself."

The Mt. Lebanon woman began by holding the Jeffrey J. Mabon Memorial Bike/Hike, donating proceeds to different charities each year. Now in its fifth year, the event will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. July 23 at North Park and will benefit Wrapped in Love, which provides quilted, knitted, crocheted and no-sew fleece blankets to patients in local hospitals. Next month, the fledgling organization will distribute its first blankets to the Hillman Cancer Center in Pittsburgh

**"WHEN YOU'RE FACED WITH A SITUATION YOU CANNOT CHANGE, YOU WANT TO SHRINK. BUT ONCE YOU START EXPANDING, YOU TAKE ACTION. ... WHEN YOU TAKE ACTION OF ANY KIND, YOU HEAL YOURSELF."**

CHRIS MABON

and the outpatient infusion center at St. Clair Hospital.

"We're all children at heart, and we want a blanket, too," said Emmerich, who resides in Bridgeville. "The blankets will help patients whose immune systems are vulnerable. I remember when my husband was receiving chemotherapy, he was unable to control his body temperature."

Besides, Mabon said, "It's your own. It's something that's not white, sterile or bleached."

And with their engaging personalities, Emmerich and Mabon have had no trouble recruiting volunteers. They hooked up with the South Hills Knitting Guild, and they have secured a room at St. Winifred Roman Catholic Church, 550 Sleepy Hollow Road, Mt. Lebanon, where other volunteers, known as the Blanket Brigade, meet from 10 a.m. to noon the first Thursday of each month and from 7 to 9 p.m. the third Tuesday of each month.

"All the people we've approached have been wonderful and generous," Mabon said.

Added Emmerich, "They're like an underground network of inspiring women."

Many quilters have been using their own supplies, while others have donated scraps and other materials. One of the quilts will be raffled at the Mabon memorial bike/hike.

"We're going with handmade because they'll feel so loved," Emmerich said. "The volunteer coordinator at St. Clair told me patients can't believe a stranger would do this for them."

Then, again, "We all need that human touch," Mabon said.

Ironically, neither Emmerich nor Mabon quilt, knit or crochet. But that's not stopping them from making blankets. They're just going the no-sew fleece route.

"This is my contribution of being able to tie one on," Mabon joked.

As their inventory increases, the women hope to bring other hospitals on board, including Canonsburg General.

"Everybody is on our radar," Mabon said. "We will move as quickly as our supply allows us."

Churches, schools and senior centers also are encouraged to join forces with Wrapped in Love. Two area schools already are planning fundraisers.

"We can't cure them medically," Mabon said, "but maybe we can make them more comfortable."

For more information about Wrapped in Love, visit [www.wrappedinlovefoundation.com](http://www.wrappedinlovefoundation.com), or "like" the organization on Facebook. For monetary donations, make checks payable to Wrapped in Love Foundation Inc. and mail to P.O. Box 13486, Pittsburgh, PA 15243.

For more information about the Jeffrey L. Mabon Memorial Bike/Hike, e-mail [Russell.G.Roll@tra-advisors.com](mailto:Russell.G.Roll@tra-advisors.com).

# Seven medical tests that could save your life

BY MARJIE GILLIAM  
Cox Newspapers

DAYTON, Ohio – Prevention magazine recently outlined important topics around heart health, including the seven tests that could save your life.

**1. Cardiac calcium scoring**  
With this test, a CT scanner checks the heart's arteries for signs of atherosclerotic plaque, made up of calcium, cholesterol and scar tissue.

Electrodes are attached to the chest and to an EKG machine that monitors heartbeat. The patient lies on an exam table that slides into a short, doughnut-shaped tunnel, and is asked to hold his breath for 10 to 20 seconds. Cost can range from \$99 to \$399; duration of test is only 10 minutes.

Calcium scoring is the best predictor of a future heart attack, according to Dr. Agatston, leading preventive cardiologist and creator and author of "The South Beach Diet." Calcified plaque, a major warning sign of coronary artery disease and the leading cause of heart attacks, shows up at least 10 years before a heart attack or stroke hits. If caught early, it can be treated before a buildup narrows arteries so severely that it triggers a heart attack.

Advised for those 50 or older with risk factors, or at a younger age if there is a family history and several risk factors. Since the test involves X-rays, women shouldn't have it if there is any chance they might be pregnant.

**2. Carotid intimal medial thickness test**

This "ultrasound of the neck" takes a picture of the left and right carotid arteries, which supply blood to your head and brain. A gel is applied to the neck, and an ultrasound transducer slides over the carotids to measure thickness of the arteries' lining. Cost ranges from \$150 to \$500; duration: 15 minutes.

Studies have shown a link between abnormal thickness of the carotid lining and coronary artery disease. This test can detect the earliest stages, before blood flow is blocked.

Advised for those 40 or older, or younger if a close relative (parents or siblings) had a heart attack or stroke before age 55.

**3. High-sensitivity c-reactive protein test**

A blood test that measures CRP, a protein in the blood that is a strong indicator of inflammation throughout the body. Cost, \$8; duration, 5 minutes.

Blood vessels are injured by cholesterol plaque. This in turn triggers inflammation and raises CRP levels in the blood. Women with high levels of CRP may be up to four times more likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke.

A high CRP is most dangerous if you also have a waist circumference of more than 35 inches for women or more than

40 for men, indicating the presence of belly fat. Advised for those 40 or older.

**4. Advanced lipid profile and lipoprotein(a) test**

Traditional cholesterol blood tests measure total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, and triglycerides, while this test goes a step further, looking at particle size.

This is important because some particles are larger and fluffier, tending to bounce off artery walls as they travel through the body. Others are small and dense, and can penetrate the artery lining and form clumps of plaque.

Having many large particles lessens risk of heart disease, while small ones increase it. The Lp(a) blood test analyzes a specific type of cholesterol that can triple heart risk.

Cost: \$19 each. Duration: 5 minutes. Advised for those with a family history of heart disease.

**5. A1C blood glucose test**

A simple way to detect future risk of diabetes, this blood test indicates average level of blood sugar over the prior three months. Unlike other glucose tests that require fasting or drinking a sugary beverage, this test requires neither.

An estimated 5.7 million Americans have undiagnosed diabetes, in addition to 17.9 million who have been diagnosed. Diabetes puts you at five times higher risk of developing heart disease.

Cost: \$50. Duration: 5 minutes.

Advised for those 45 or older, or younger if overweight and have one or more diabetes risk factors, such as family history, high triglycerides, or low HDL.

**6. Genetic tests**

A blood sample is tested at a lab for mutations of the KIF6 and APOE genes.

Cost: \$130 each. Duration: 5 minutes.

A common variation in the KIF6 gene and two mutations in the APOE gene raise heart disease risk. These tests can help your doctor better tailor treatment to help prevent a heart attack.

Advised for those 40 or older.

**7. Stress echocardiography**

A step above a standard stress test because it adds an ultrasound both before and after exercise to evaluate blood flow to the heart's pumping chambers and check for blockages in arteries.

Cost: \$850 to \$1,600. Duration: 45 minutes.

Advised for those who have signs of heart disease, regardless of age. Symptoms can include shortness of breath, chest pain, nausea and neck pain, to name a few. If reduced blood flow is detected, one or more of the coronary arteries may be blocked.

Marjie Gilliam is a certified personal trainer and fitness consultant.

# A dessert takes on ubiquitous bruschetta

BY JIM ROMANOFF  
For the Associated Press

Traditional tomato bruschetta has become so ubiquitous in the U.S. you can even buy jars of prepared toppings and pre-toasted bread. So we decided to reinvent it as a breakfast or dessert item.

Instead of starting with a garlic-rubbed toast, we take slices of baguette and slather them with low-fat, yet creamy part-skim ricotta cheese. If you like, you could vary the recipe by using Neufchatel (reduced-fat cream cheese) or even thick Greek-style yogurt.

We then top them with sliced strawberries and a drizzle of honey – reminiscent of the tomatoes and olive oil from traditional versions. Capping the creamy strawberry toasts is a sprinkle of herbs to add a fresh counterpoint to all the sweetness.

While these strawberry-ricotta bruschetta are a natural fit as part of a breakfast or brunch, they make a fine passed appetizer as well.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

While these bruschetta are a natural fit as part of a breakfast or brunch, they make a fine appetizer as well.

For a tart variation, toss the diced strawberries in a sweet balsamic vinegar glaze before assembling and skip the honey drizzle.

## Strawberry-Ricotta Bruschetta

Start to finish: 10 minutes  
Servings: 10 (2 slices per serving)

Ingredients  
12-inch baguette, cut into 20 slices  
1½ cups part-skim ricotta cheese  
1 pound strawberries, hulled and cut into ¼-inch dice  
Honey, to taste  
20 fresh mint or basil leaves, cut in thin strips (chiffonade)

Lightly toast the slices of baguette. Spread each slice with about 1 tablespoon of ricotta cheese. Divide the diced strawberries among the slices of toast. Drizzle with honey, sprinkle with mint (or basil) and serve.

Nutrition information per 2 slices (values are rounded to the nearest whole number): 270 calories; 34 calories from fat (13 percent of total calories); 4 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 10 mg cholesterol; 48 g carbohydrate; 11 g protein; 3 g fiber; 457 mg sodium.

# HEALTH

**Breast-feeding class** will begin at 6:30 p.m. Monday at Mon-Vale HealthPLEX, Rostraver. Husbands and grandmothers also are encouraged to attend. For more information, call 724-258-2229.

**Understanding Your Diabetes Meal Plan** will begin at 9 a.m. Tuesday at Mon-Vale HealthPLEX. The program builds on Managing Your Diabetes. To register, call 724-258-1483.

**CPR instruction** will begin at 6 p.m. Tuesday in the Education Conference Center at Monongahela Valley Hospital. Fee is \$30. To register, call 724-684-9536.

**Understanding Your Blood Sugar Readings** will begin

at 9 a.m. Wednesday at Mon-Vale HealthPLEX. Completion of Managing Your Diabetes education program is required. To register, call 724-258-1483.

**Diabetes Education Day – Prediabetes and Prevention** begins at 6 p.m. in the Education Conference Center at Monongahela Valley Hospital. Completion of the Managing Your Diabetes education program is required. To register, call 724-258-1483.

**Infant/child CPR instruction** will begin at 6 p.m. Thursday in the Education Conference Center at Monongahela Valley Hospital. Fee is \$30. To register, call 724-684-9536.