



39 **Dr. Emil Hayek**
Medical director of the
Heart & Vascular Center
Akron General Medical Center

It doesn't take long for Dr. Emil Hayek to launch into a fast-paced, information-laden, passionate talk about the heart.

After all, the 39-year-old medical director of the Heart & Vascular Center at Akron General Medical Center sees a lot of problems in his job and he's determined to solve them.

Dr. Hayek said it's frustrating to see how badly children and adults treat their bodies. They smoke, eat poorly, are overweight and don't exercise — all of which can lead to heart disease.

"It's not unheard of to have a heart attack before 40," he said. "It's because of the things people have done in the past."

To top it off, people also tend to ignore the warning signs of heart disease and often land in Dr. Hayek's office only after a spouse makes them go, which can delay treatment.

"People never want to believe it can happen to them," Dr. Hayek

said. "(But) once you're in the heart disease club, you're in. You're a member, and it's not curable."

But if people are going to be lifetime members, he at least wants them to live as healthy and as long as possible, so he has a few tricks to help people change their bad habits and put less strain on their hearts.

Dr. Hayek involves spouses and other family members in the patient's treatment as early as possible. A wellness regimen will only work for the patient if the family follows the same rules, such as stopping smoking, he said.

He also strives to help patients understand what's happening inside their bodies, which he said means spending more time with them than many doctors are able to do.

It was the lack of patient education he received from a doctor during his junior year at the University of Pennsylvania that compelled him to become a doctor and treat patients the way he wanted to be treated. While seeking an engineering degree, Dr. Hayek found out he had a tumor on his rib, and a portion of his rib had to be removed. The doctor scheduled him for surgery the next week without explaining anything.

"That's what made me want to go into medicine, because I was so appalled at the way this doctor did things," said Dr. Hayek, who switched majors and went to Johns Hopkins University for medical school.

That Pennsylvania doctor's mistake was a boon for Akron General. Dr. George Litman, chief of cardiology at Akron General, has worked with Dr. Hayek for seven years.

"He's direct, he's honest, straightforward and he provides good education," said Dr. Litman. "He's one of these guys with boundless energy."

— Shannon Mortland