

February: American Heart Month

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Did you know February is American Heart Month, and not because of Valentine's Day? Since 1963 Congress has required the president to proclaim



February "American Heart Month" to raise awareness about heart disease. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability. Your best weapons to fight cardiovascular

disease are to know your risks, understand warning signs, and have a healthy diet and lifestyle. Although many associate heart disease with men, it is also the leading cause of death among women. Check out the following tips on how to be heart smart this February.

Tips to Be Heart Smart:



Know your Risks: Risk factors commonly associated with heart disease are high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, and

secondhand smoke. Learn about your health risks at hearthub.org by taking risk assessments on diabetes, heart attack, and high blood pressure. Remember, knowledge is power, and knowing your risk is the key to keeping yourself healthy. Go to www.hearthub.org, scroll down the page and click on "What's Your Risk?"



Warning Signs: Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, whereas most start slow, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people are not sure what is

wrong and wait too long before getting help. Heart attack warning signs can include chest discomfort, discomfort in the upper body,



shortness of breath, a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness. The most common heart attack symptom for men and women is chest pain or discomfort. However,

women are somewhat more likely than men to have other common symptoms, especially shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, and back or jaw pain. Remember that minutes matter and fast action can save lives.

Bump up the Nutrition:



Aim to eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, fat-free and low-fat dairy and limit items that are high in sugar, sodium, and fats. Reading food labels on packages and containers can help you choose healthier products and make comparisons between similar products.

- **Vary your veggies.** Try buying vegetables in season for better flavor and lower cost. Stock up on frozen veggies for quick cooking in the microwave. Watch out for extra sauces or seasonings, which can add fat, calories and sodium, by checking the Nutrition Facts Label.
- **Focus on fruits.** Put fruit where you will see it, such as a bowl on the table, counter, or cut-up in a container in the fridge. Buy fruit in season for better taste and lower cost. Buy fruits in different forms (dried, frozen, canned [in water or juice], and fresh), to increase your options.
- **Choose more whole grains.** Substitute a whole-grain product for a refined one, such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white or brown rice instead of white. Try brown rice in baked green peppers and whole-wheat macaroni in macaroni and cheese. Use whole wheat or oat flour for up to half of the flour in pancake, waffle, and muffin recipes. Try an unsweetened, whole grain ready-to-eat cereal as croutons in salad or in place of crackers with soup.

Know how. Know now.



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- **Choose fat-free or low-fat dairy.** Include fat-free or low-fat milk at meals. If you usually drink whole milk, switch gradually to fat-free milk, to lower fat and calories. Have fat-free or low-fat yogurt as a snack, as a dip for fruits and vegetables, or a topping for a baked potato. Top casseroles, soups, stews, or vegetables with shredded low-fat cheese.
- **Go lean with protein.** Start with a lean choice. Examples of lean cuts of beef include round steaks and roasts, top loin, top sirloin, and chuck shoulder and arm roasts. Examples for pork include pork loin, tenderloin, and center loin. Boneless, skinless chicken breasts and turkey cutlets are the leanest poultry choices. Keep your choices lean by trimming away visible fat from meats and poultry and broiling, grilling, roasting, poaching, or boiling meat, poultry, or fish instead of frying.



Get Active: Research shows exercise helps prevent heart disease and obesity, and lowers blood pressure. Aim for 30 to 60 minutes on most days. You can even spread it out over the course of your day. Choose activities you enjoy and can do regularly.

Tips to be more active at home.

- Join a walking group. Recruit a partner for support.
- Walk up and down the soccer or softball field sidelines while watching the kids play.
- Take some laps around your local mall or grocery store.
- Walk, skate, or cycle more, and drive less.
- Do stretches, exercises, or pedal a stationary bike while watching television.

Tips to be more active at work.

- Replace a coffee break with a 10-minute walk.
- Take part in an exercise program at work.
- Join the office softball or bowling team.

Tips to be more active at play.

- Walk, jog, skate, or cycle.
- Swim or do water aerobics.
- Take a class in martial arts, dance, or yoga.
- Golf (pull cart or carry clubs).
- Play racquetball, tennis, or squash.
- Play basketball, softball, or soccer.



Quit Smoking: Did you know that cigarette smokers are two to three times more likely to die from coronary heart disease than non-smokers? Don't waste time when it comes to quitting smoking. Within a few years of quitting, your risk of stroke and coronary artery disease are similar to non-smokers. Visit www.americanheart.org and www.smokefree.gov for more information and resources on quitting.

When it comes to changing your habits, there are lots of different ways to make it happen. Experiment and try different methods and find out what works best for you. Go to food.unl.edu for more food, nutrition, and health information.

Additional Resources:

1. Omega-3 and Omega-6 Fatty Acids. Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids, found in foods, are important to health. Learn how much you need and which foods are the best sources.

<http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g2032.pdf>

2. How Much Sodium Are You Eating? Although some sodium is good for the body, Americans typically consume about twice the amount considered healthy. Learn how to reduce sodium intake through food choices.

<http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/g1974.pdf>

Sources:

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