

Candy Hearts Aren't the Only Ones That Should Get Your Attention This Month – February Is National Heart Health Month

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women in the United States. More than one quarter of all deaths are from heart disease, and heart disease is a leading cause of disability.

“In addition to the lives lost to heart disease, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, estimates that heart disease cost the United States approximately \$316.4 billion in 2010. This total includes the cost of health care services, medications and lost productivity,” says Beth Buckley, Clinical Operations practice leader at Quorum Health Resources (QHR). “Fortunately, there are a number of things you can do reduce your chances of developing heart disease.”

The American Heart Association offers “The Simple 7” – seven simple steps you can take now to improve your heart health:

Get Active. Did you know that by exercising as few as 30 minutes per day, you can improve your heart health and quality of life? In fact, studies show that for every hour of walking, you may increase your life expectancy by two hours.

Eat Better. A healthy diet is one that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts; and is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium and added sugars. A healthy diet also emphasizes making smart choices from every food group and paying attention to portion sizes and overall caloric intake.

Lose Weight. Among Americans age 20 and older, 145 million are overweight or obese (BMI of 25.0 kg/m² and higher). That's 76.9 million men and 68.1 million women. This is of great concern, because obesity is now recognized as a major, independent risk factor for heart disease. Not sure how to kick off your weight loss effort? Ask your general practitioner for guidance.

Control Cholesterol. There are two types of cholesterol: “good” (HDL) and “bad” (LDL). It's important to understand the difference, and to know the levels of each in your blood. A total cholesterol level over 200, a “good” cholesterol level under 40, or a “bad” cholesterol level over 160 generally indicates an increased risk for heart disease. Don't know your numbers? Talk to a doctor about a cholesterol screening. Then, take steps to move your numbers in the right direction.

Manage Blood Pressure. Hypertension is the single most significant risk factor for heart disease. One in three adults has high blood pressure, yet, about 21 percent don't know they have it. Of those with high blood pressure, 69 percent are receiving treatment, yet, only 45 percent have their blood pressure under control.

“Because there are generally no symptoms associated with high blood pressure, it's important that you work with your doctor to monitor and control it, especially as you age,” says Dr. Keyur Patel, Chief of Medical Staff, at Sturgis Hospital. “Key steps include maintaining a healthy lifestyle and following the treatment plan that your doctor prescribes.”

Reduce Blood Sugar. Diabetes is considered one of the major controllable risk factors for cardiovascular disease. In fact, adults with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have heart disease or a stroke than adults without diabetes.

If you have diabetes, it's critical to monitor your blood sugar level and have regular check-ups. Work closely with your healthcare provider to manage your disease and control other risk factors.

Stop Smoking. Smoking is the most important preventable cause of premature death in the United States. Smokers have a higher risk of developing many chronic disorders, including atherosclerosis – the buildup of fatty substances in the arteries – which can lead to coronary heart disease, heart attack and stroke. Controlling or reversing atherosclerosis is an important part of preventing future heart attack or stroke.

“It's also important to control stress and anger, which can put you at increased risk for heart attack or stroke,” adds Dr. Patel “There are a number of stress and anger management techniques that can help, including breathing exercises, yoga, journaling, and eliminating as many environmental stressors as possible.”

This article courtesy of Sturgis Hospital and Quorum Health Resources (QHR).

SIDEBAR

Try these “super foods” to boost nutritional goodness while eating your way to a healthier heart

Blueberries top the list as one of the most powerful disease-fighting foods. That's because they contain the antioxidant anthocyanins. These delicious jewels are packed with fiber, vitamin C, and are available all year long. Boost heart health by adding them into your diet regularly. Here's how:

- Top your whole-grain cereal with fresh or frozen blueberries to add delicious flavor, a dose of fiber, and heart-healthy antioxidants.
- Power up pancakes, waffles or muffins with fresh, frozen or dried blueberries for a nutritious breakfast.
- Eat them plain or mix with other fruit for a low-calorie, high-fiber tasty fruit salad, dessert or snack.

Salmon is a great source of protein and packed with heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. The American Heart Association advises eating salmon and other omega-3 rich foods twice a week for benefits that go beyond heart health. Americans love salmon because it is so versatile, easy to cook and tastes great.

- Salmon is easy to prepare on the grill, in the oven or microwave, or on the stovetop. Save leftovers to toss into pasta dishes, make into salmon cakes, add to salads, or mix into dips or spreads.

- Smoked salmon comes in two varieties. The raw type is commonly used in appetizers and on bagels with cream cheese and capers. The dry smoked type has more of a cooked appearance. You can enjoy it the same way as the raw style, and add it to cooked dishes such as pasta.
- Salmon cooks in a matter of minutes and its delicate texture quickly absorbs and showcases the flavor of added ingredients. For example, toss chunks of salmon into a chowder of corn and potatoes, or wrap salmon with herbs and chopped onion and tomatoes in parchment or aluminum foil and grill or bake 12 minutes for a satisfying meal.

Soy Protein is an inexpensive, high-quality protein that contains fiber, vitamins and minerals – all the ingredients for a heart-healthy meal. A diet rich in soy protein can also lower triglycerides, which help prevent cardiovascular disease and keep your heart strong and healthy.

- Pack a soy protein bar or a bag of soy nuts for a quick snack during the day.
- Edamame are snacks even kids will love! Find these nutritious nuggets in the freezer section at your supermarket. Boil them, then serve warm in the pod. Pop them out of the pod to eat plain or with a low-fat dip.
- Tofu, made of soy beans, takes on the flavor of spices and foods you cook with it. Saute cubed tofu with green and red peppers, sliced garlic, and a dash or two of curry powder.

Oatmeal. The oats in oatmeal are nourishing whole grains and a great source of vitamins, minerals and cholesterol-lowering fiber. The FDA allows manufacturers of oats to make health claims about the grain on their products, suggesting that a diet high in oats can reduce the risk for heart disease. Research shows oats lower cholesterol levels, keep you regular, and may help prevent certain cancers.

- A warm bowl of oatmeal fills the belly for hours with its high fiber content. Top it off with fruit for added fiber, vitamins and minerals.
- Add oats whenever you bake. Substitute up to one-third of the flour with oats in pancakes, muffins, quick breads, cookies and coffee cakes for an added dose of fiber.
- Use oats in place of bread crumbs in dishes such as meatloaf, meatballs or breading on poultry.

Spinach is the powerhouse of the vegetable kingdom. Its rich, dark color comes from the multiple phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals (especially folate and iron) that also fight disease, protect against heart disease and preserve your eyesight.

- Keep frozen, chopped spinach in your freezer for an easy, quick addition to pizza, pasta, soups and stews. Just defrost and squeeze the liquid from a box of chopped spinach before you toss into cooked dishes.
- Mix fresh spinach with salad greens or alone, then top with peeled and segmented Mandarin oranges or sliced strawberries, nuts and crumbled cheese for a satisfying and delicious salad.
- Steam spinach, mix with garlic, a little olive oil, and a squeeze of lemon for a low-fat potato topper.

- Courtesy of WebMD