

Heart Healthy Tips for February

Many people know that 20 minutes of exercise 5 days a week is a great way to stay healthy. However, if you can't do that amount every day, some exercise is better than none at all. The major benefits of exercise on the heart is increased oxygenation of the muscle which is an important "nutrient" for muscle function, decreased blood pressure so that the work load of the heart pumping blood out into the body is lessened, and decreased stress which leads to less cortisol (stress hormone) production. Elevated cortisol levels lead to increased belly fat, increased fat in the arteries of the heart, and increased blood pressure.

Eating right is also important. Dieting is not always the answer if you are yo-yo dieting. A steady diet of the right foods, in the right amount and at the right time of day will automatically help you lose weight and feel healthier; which in turn will make you feel like adding the benefits of exercise. Eating the right foods in the right amount is one of the most important things people of all ages can do.

Hints on proper eating for better heart health:

- Don't overload your plate. It is better to eat six small meals a day than overeat during three meals.
- Eat until you are satisfied. With "biggie-sized" meals and drinks, we've become accustom to feeling full, rather than recognizing that you only need to feel that you've taken care of the hungry feeling.
- Cut down on processed foods and high-sodium foods (lunchmeat, chips, French fries)
- Limit fats that are solid at room temperature (butter, Crisco, lard, meat fat)
- Increase your Omega-3 fatty acids by eating more fish (salmon, tuna, herring, mackerel), beans & nuts (walnuts, soybeans), and use canola or olive oil.
- Increase your intake of fruits and vegetables. Peas, beans and lentils can be an excellent replacement for meat.
- Choose meats that are only 10% fat. Read the label; you will likely pay a few cents a pound more because it is healthier, but meats that say they are 90% lean are your best choice.
- Limit sodium to one teaspoon a day (2300 mg). Salt retains body water making you feel bloated, increases your blood pressure and contributes to hardening of the arteries and/or kidney stones.

Resources for Heart Healthy Living and Recipes can be found at the following websites:

1. American Heart Association: http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/HealthyCooking/Simple-Cooking-with-Heart-Home-Page_UCM_430043_SubHomePage.jsp
2. Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/heart-healthy-recipes/RE00098>
3. National Institutes of Health: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/contact/index.htm>