

Everyday Heart Health

By Suze Hargraves

It's February and that means it's American Heart Month, so it's time to talk about the heart. I'm not going to try to explain the complicated systems, types of disease or delve into the medical statistics. I'm going to give you one simple fact: If you don't take care of your heart, it will stop working properly. That's just a simple fact.

Taking care of your heart on a daily basis means eating right and getting exercise. I know you've heard that before and it's tedious and annoying to those of us who may not always be on the "health nut" train, but it's the truth. Don't worry though; you don't have to jump into major life changes or set lofty goals to make a positive difference in your heart health. There are lots of simple things we can change and do to help your ticker keep on ticking. Here's a list of ten tips easily incorporated into daily life:

1. Walk more. This doesn't mean you have to buy special sneakers or gear up for a marathon. It means park further from the store, walk from store to store (You know you've done it-taken the car to get from Hannaford's over to JC Penney.), take an extra lap around Wal-Mart or just take a stroll up and down your street. Incorporate more walking into your everyday life. You can increase how much or how vigorously you walk based on how you feel and what your healthcare provider advises.
2. Put down the chips. Do a purge on your refrigerator and cabinets. Get the junk food out of the house. Instead of buying a bag of greasy cheese doodles, pick up a package of baby carrots. Be conscious of what you and others bring into your home. Make it a junk free zone.
3. Take a peek over at Fido. Is he looking like a chubby puppy? It's not a reflection on the dog. It's a reflection on you. He needs a walk just as much as you do. Not only do you get heart healthy exercise, but Fido will live longer and be a better behaved dog. You can also volunteer to walk dogs at local animal shelters. Dogs are great motivators when it comes to walking their humans.
4. If you're a television junkie, turn off the set for at least an hour a day. Do something that requires you to use your body in some way. Housework can be heart healthy especially when you do it at a little faster pace. Maybe even do some dancing while nobody's looking. Don't forget sex! Not only will you enhance your relationship, but you'll be getting that heart pumping and relieving stress!
5. If you're not in condition to, or are medically prohibited from, engaging in a walking program, you need to check out The Gibson Center. They offer chair exercise classes. Visit them online at gibsoncenter.org or call 356-3231 for information.
6. Commit to eating a piece of fruit every day. Yes, you're supposed to eat more than that but if you haven't been eating right for years, adding one piece of fruit daily is a great way to change your habits. It's also a way to reprogram your body to crave an orange instead of a cookie.
7. Use your computer, iPhone, Blackberry or other electronic gizmo to help you stay healthy. There are thousands of free applications available to help you track your diet, weight, daily activity and more. Check out the websites for American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org) and American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org) for tons of free stuff to help you on your way to a healthier heart.
8. Keep your meals heart healthy by minimizing fats and maximizing whole grains. There's a lot more you can do, but those are two easy changes to incorporate diet changes that will make a big difference. More hearth healthy diet information is available at www.americanheart.org.
9. Relaxation and stress reduction lead to a healthier heart. Try activities like yoga, meditation or tia chi. If these activities aren't your style try deep breathing or listening to soothing music. Engage in a healthy pastime, craft or hobby that helps you unwind.
10. Know your risks for heart disease, diabetes and other health conditions that can adversely affect your heart health. When you know your risks you can start managing them. See your healthcare provider or for \$20 you can get a Healthy Heart Screen at White Mountain Community Health Center. We will give you the results to give to your medical provider. Call us at 447-8900 ext. 1 for more information.

It's never too late however to start treating your heart with the respect it demands to keep working the way it should. Show yourself some love. Give yourself the gift of a commitment to a healthy heart.

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