

Taking care of yourself is a commitment of the heart

Hello to all! Hope you have had a magnificent February start! February reminds us of hearts, and we all have one. For the women, how many of you wore red February 4th? This was the day designated by the American Heart Association as "Wear Red Day for Women". If you did, good for you! If you did not, you may have another chance February next year. It will be the public opportunity to show support for women who have been touched by heart disease and stroke. In the mean time, let's take care of our hearts. And by the way, taking care of the heart goes for men, too.

Heart disease and stroke are killers or disabling conditions for women as well as for men. It is guaranteed that many names come to mind when heart disease or stroke is mentioned.

In a nutshell, these are general guidelines for the prevention or reduction of the risk for heart disease or stroke. Get to know the risk factors that you can do something about. These factors are: obesity, high cholesterol, diabetes, physical inactivity, smoking, stress, and high blood pressure. Knowing how many of these factors you may have is the first step to move towards behavior changes to reduce the risk for heart disease and stroke.

Consider these pointers when thinking of your behavior change goals:

1. Move towards a healthier weight for your height
2. Increase your physical activities to at least achieve 30 minutes of aerobic exercise most days of the week. Brisk walks can help.
3. Do not smoke.
4. Eat a balanced meal plan that includes a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grain products, mono-fats from avocado, olive or canola oils, fat free/ low fat dairy products including the ones with beneficial bacteria, nuts, fatty fish, lean poultry, lean meats, and plenty of water.
5. Reduce trans fats. Be aware that most come from hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. Control cholesterol in foods to no more than 300 milligrams per day. Keep sodium under check, close or less than 2400 milligrams per day. Use the label for amount of these in foods.
6. Keep your LDL- the bad blood cholesterol under 130 or 100 if showing signs of heart problems.
7. Keep the blood triglycerides under 150 and increase your good blood cholesterol- HDL to at least 50.
8. Maintain the blood pressure below 120/80.

9. Go for regular doctor check ups, including one before starting a program of physical activities. Discuss medicine and alcohol use with your doctor and pharmacist.

10. Participate in activities that bring enjoyment and relaxation.

Taking steps to decrease your risks for heart disease and stroke might be a challenge for you. Closing The Gap- an education program for the prevention and control of diabetes Type 2 can help you with nutrition classes to help you manage weight, cholesterol, blood pressure, and diabetes type 2. A new cooking class for people with diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol will be offered starting in March. For a calendar of events and to register call (407) 343-2082 or (407) 343-2076. You can also get information on how to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke by calling 1-888-my-heart or by logging on to www.americanheart.org. For stroke information call 1-888-4 STROKE, and visit www.StrokeAssociation.org. Other webs of interest are: www.deliciousdecisions.org, and for menus low in sodium and calories: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health. Look under recipe collections. You can also register for the free Cholesterol Low Down Program by calling 1-800-242-8721 or www.americanheart.org/cld.

According to the American Heart Association these are the warning signs of a heart attack: Call 9-1-1 immediately if any occur:

1. Discomfort in the center of the chest, that lasts more than a few minutes or that goes away and come back. It may feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain.
2. Pain or discomfort in other areas of the upper body, such as one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
3. Shortness of breath, which usually accompanies the chest discomfort, although it can occur before the chest discomfort.
4. Other signs include a cold sweat, nausea or lightheadedness. Do not delay; call 9-1-1, YOUR HEART IS AT STAKE.

The American Stroke Association indicates that there are warning signs of a stroke. Call 9-1-1 immediately if any occur. These are:

1. Sudden numbness of face, arm, and leg especially on one side of the body.
2. Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding.
3. Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
4. Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.

5. Sudden severe headache with no known cause. Not all these warning signs occur in every STROKE. If any or one starts to occur, get help immediately, TIME LOST IS BRAIN LOST.

Marie LoPresti is a Community Nutritionist in the Osceola County Health Department. You can contact Marie by calling Closing The Gap.