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February 2012

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Ease Stress to Improve Heart Health

February is Heart Month, sponsored by the American Heart Association. This month, focus on reducing your stress, which can improve your heart health and lower your risk of heart disease.

Did you know that the heart and brain have a significant connection and impact on each other in your body?



Due to this, mental health can have a dramatic effect on heart health, and vice versa.

When you experience stress, which is a response in your brain, the body responds by increasing:

- Blood pressure
- Respiratory rate
- Heart rate

- Oxygen consumption
- Blood flow to skeletal muscles

If you experience frequent stress, you are putting your body at an increased risk for heart disease.

How do you combat stress? There are many strategies and techniques for reducing stress in your life:

- Meditate. Try sitting down in a quiet, comfortable room, and focusing your attention on one word, phrase or image in your mind. Repeat this thing over and over, refocusing if your mind wanders.
- Read a book or listen to calming music.
- Exercise. Getting your blood pumping is an excellent way to relieve stress, and is also great for your heart.
- Eat nutritiously—don't turn to junk food, alcohol or tobacco. Healthy food will energize you, while other options have negative effects on your body.
- Confide in a loved one.
- When feeling overwhelmed, plan and prioritize instead of trying to tackle everything at once. Also try taking a break from the situation.

A Healthy Valentine

Valentine's Day brings to mind fancy dinner, boxes of chocolate and heart-shaped candies—but you can avoid busting your diet while celebrating with your sweetheart. Try these suggestions:

- Go out for lunch instead of dinner to take advantage of smaller portions.
- Or, get romantic and share a meal at dinner to cut the calories.
- Choose flowers or another gift rather than chocolate or candy.
- Make your own healthy meal at home.
- For a romantic dessert, make dark chocolate fondue with lots of fruit.

DID YOU KNOW

Eating poorly on one day isn't necessarily a disaster, but those excesses can easily sneak up and become bad habits. Plus, indulging on every holiday or special event really adds up—consider ways to make each special day or event more nutritious and your waistline will thank you.



Safe Sleeping Can Prevent Infant Death

Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) is the leading cause of death for infants between 1 month and 12 months of age. Though the cause of SIDS is often unknown, one contributing factor can be unsafe sleep. Follow these guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics for infant safe sleeping:

- Babies should always sleep in a crib or bassinet, not your bed or couch. The crib should be free from toys, pillows, quilts, soft bedding or anything else.
- The safest place for the crib is your bedroom, so you are close to your baby in case of need.
- Babies should always be placed face up on their backs.
- Dress your baby lightly to avoid overheating and make sure the room is at a comfortable temperature.



- If a light blanket is necessary, tuck the sides and bottom of the blanket into the sides of the crib. The blanket should be below the baby's arms.
- When having anyone else care for your baby, discuss these safe sleep practices to ensure they are followed at all times.

Cut Your Grocery Bill in Half



Looking to save some money on groceries—or anything else you're buying? If you're not taking advantage of couponing, you are leaving hundreds of dollars on the table. Extreme couponing is a trend in the media recently, but you don't have to dedicate your life just to save money with coupons. Here are some tips:

- Look for manufacturer's coupons online or in the newspaper, and always use them when the item is also on sale at the store to maximize your savings.
- When shopping online, browse around for free shipping codes and other coupons before buying.
- Whether buying in-store or online, always shop around.
- Some retailers offer e-newsletters with sales, promotions and coupon codes. Find some and sign up.
- Follow your favorite retailers on social media to stay up to date on sales and "insider" deals.
- Join daily deal sites, such as Groupon or Living Social.
- Buy according to sales cycles. For example, buy fruit in season, buy summer clothes on sale in August, etc.

Baked Apple Slices

Try this recipe for a healthy, delicious Valentine's Day dessert.

- 2 oranges
- 2 tbsp. honey
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. ground cloves
- 3 apples, peeled, cored and cut into ½ inch slices
- 5 tbsp. raisins
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts
- ¼ cup low-fat vanilla yogurt

Preheat the oven to 500 degrees F. Grate the zest of one orange, set aside. Squeeze the juice from both oranges into a small bowl; stir in honey, cinnamon, cloves and half the zest. Lay half the apple slices in a glass baking dish. Scatter the raisins and half the walnuts on top. Pour on half the juice mixture. Add the remaining apples and juice. Sprinkle the top with the remaining walnuts and orange zest. Cover lightly with foil and bake 30 minutes. Serve with a dollop of yogurt.

Yield: 4 servings. Each serving provides: 206 calories, 6g total fat, 1g saturated fat, 41g carbohydrates, 13mg sodium and 4g fiber. Source: www.health.gov.



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Heart Disease

Heart disease is a common term for coronary artery disease. It is the number one cause of death in both men and women over the age of 60 in the United States.

Causes

Heart disease is caused by atherosclerosis – a buildup of plaque in the inner walls of the arteries – which narrows, slows or blocks the flow of blood to the heart.

Risk Factors

Controllable risk factors for heart disease include:

- High blood pressure
- High LDL cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes
- Smoking
- Being overweight or obese
- Lack of physical activity
- Using illegal drugs, such as cocaine or speed

Warning Signs

The symptoms you experience depend on the type and severity of your heart condition. Common signs and symptoms of heart disease include:

- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Chest pain or discomfort

- Heart palpitations
- Weakness or fatigue

Call your doctor if you begin to have new symptoms or if they become more frequent or severe.

Treatment

The goals of treatment for heart disease are to relieve symptoms, control or reduce risk factors, stop or slow further damage to the arteries and prevent and treat cardiac events. Treatment includes:

- Self-care and prevention
- Medications
- Procedures to open blocked or narrowed arteries or to bypass them
- Cardiac rehabilitation

Self-Care and Prevention

- Get regular medical check-ups.
- Don't smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Take medications as prescribed.
- If you are at a higher risk for heart disease, ask your

doctor about low-dose aspirin therapy.

- Watch for signs of diabetes and see your doctor if you have any symptoms.
- Follow a diet low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol.
- Limit sodium intake to 1,500 to 2,400 milligrams per day.
- Exercise regularly.
- Manage stress by practicing relaxation techniques.
- Drink alcohol in moderation. Check with your doctor to find out if and how much you may drink.



Did You Know...?

The most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. But women are more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms, particularly shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting and back or jaw pain.

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What are Your Numbers?

Health numbers you need to know!

Knowing your blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and body mass index (BMI) are extremely vital in determining whether you are at risk for developing major illnesses, such as heart disease and diabetes. If you know your numbers are out of the healthy range, you can take measures to get yourself back into good health.

Cholesterol

An unexpected heart attack may be caused by years of living with high cholesterol and extra fat stored in the body.

Total cholesterol should be 200 or less. You should also ask your doctor what your HDL cholesterol (good) and LDL cholesterol (bad) levels are.

Having high total cholesterol, high LDL or low HDL can put you at risk for a heart attack or stroke. Since there are no symptoms of high cholesterol, it is imperative that you know your numbers.

Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the amount of force that it takes for your heart to pump blood through your body. High blood pressure, known as hypertension,

increases your risk of heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. It can also cause damage to your brain, eyes and arteries. **Blood pressure should be 120 over 80.**

Much like cholesterol, there are no symptoms of high blood pressure, so knowing your numbers is key to good health.

Blood Sugar

Glucose is sugar that is stored in the blood as your main source of energy. If your glucose levels are too high or too low, you can develop diabetes. **The normal range for blood sugar is 80 to 120.**

Since diabetes can strike anyone of any age, it is essential that you know your blood sugar number. This is especially true if you experience any of the following symptoms of diabetes: frequent urination, extreme hunger, thirst, unusual weight loss, increased fatigue or blurry vision. If diabetes is left untreated, it can lead to heart disease, blindness, amputation

of the arms or legs and/or kidney disease.

Body Mass Index

BMI measures your weight in relation to your height. This measurement indicates whether your weight falls within a normal, healthy range. **Your BMI should be less than 25. A BMI over 25 indicates that you are overweight and a BMI over 30 indicates that you are obese.**

Carrying extra weight can lead to high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic conditions. To figure out your BMI, use the calculator at www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi.



Did You Know...?

Knowing your numbers can reduce your risk of developing some preventable conditions. By taking control of your health, you will reduce your risk of developing illnesses, and will increase your chances of living a long, healthy life.