



News Column for use week of February 11, 2019

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Heart Health

Many folks are focused on hearts of the Valentine variety this week, but I challenge you to focus on YOUR heart too. February is recognized as Heart Health month and it is a great reminder to assess your risk for heart disease and make sure that your heart is healthy.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease doesn't happen just to older adults. It is happening to younger adults more and more often. This is partly because the conditions that lead to heart disease are happening at younger ages.

Heart disease—and the conditions that lead to it—can happen at any age. High rates of obesity and high blood pressure among younger people (ages 35-64) are putting them at risk for heart disease earlier in life. Half of all Americans have at least one of the top three risk factors for heart disease (high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking).

- **High blood pressure.** Millions of Americans of all ages have high blood pressure, including millions of people in their 40s and 50s. About half of people with high blood pressure don't have it under control. Having uncontrolled high blood pressure is one of the biggest risks for heart disease and other harmful conditions, such as stroke.
- **High blood cholesterol.** High cholesterol can increase the risk for heart disease. Having diabetes and obesity, smoking, eating unhealthy foods, and not getting enough physical activity can all contribute to unhealthy cholesterol levels.
- **Smoking.** More than 37 million U.S. adults are current smokers, and thousands of young people start smoking each day. Smoking damages the blood vessels and can cause heart disease.

Other conditions and behaviors that affect your risk for heart disease include:

- **Obesity.** Carrying extra weight puts stress on the heart. More than 1 in 3 Americans—and nearly 1 in 6 children ages 2 to 19—has obesity.
- **Diabetes.** Diabetes causes sugar to build up in the blood. This can damage blood vessels and nerves that help control the heart muscle. Nearly 1 in 10 people in the United States has diabetes.

- **Physical inactivity.** Staying physically active helps keep the heart and blood vessels healthy. Only 1 in 5 adults meets the physical activity guidelines of getting 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity.
- **Unhealthy eating patterns.** Most Americans, including children, eat too much sodium (salt), which increases blood pressure. Replacing foods high in sodium with fresh fruits and vegetables can help lower blood pressure. But only 1 in 10 adults is getting enough fruits and vegetables each day. Diet high in trans-fat, saturated fat, and added sugar increases the risk factor for heart disease.

You're in control of taking good care of your heart. Below are some of the best ways to take charge.

Don't smoke. Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. If you don't smoke, don't start. If you do smoke, talk to your doctor about getting help to quit.

Manage conditions. Work with your health care team to manage conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. This includes taking any medicines you have been prescribed.

Make heart-healthy eating changes. Eat food low in trans-fat, saturated fat, added sugar and sodium. Try to fill at least half your plate with vegetables and fruits, and aim for low sodium options. Include whole grains that are higher in fiber and lean proteins.

Stay active. Get moving for at least 150 minutes per week. You can even break up the 30 minutes into 10-minute blocks. Find activities that you enjoy and schedule it into your day.

For more information about healthy eating and physical activity, contact Kathy in the Southwind Extension District offices at kmcewan@ksu.edu or by phone at 620-365-2242.