

# FOCUS ON HEART HEALTH THIS VALENTINE'S DAY

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Did you know February is American Heart Month? With Valentine's Day approaching, it's the perfect time to be thinking about heart health! Here are some heart-related items to keep in mind.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. This is also true for the state of Kansas, where heart disease leads all causes of death. Making healthy lifestyle choices can help to prevent heart disease. Two of these choices include eating a healthy diet and being physically active. The former is essential because poor dietary quality is the top risk factor for heart disease, accounting for approximately half of heart disease deaths worldwide. The American College of Cardiology and the American Heart Association have identified several diet recommendations related to heart health. This includes following a diet which emphasizes eating vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, whole grains, and fish. They also recommend choosing foods lower in sodium and cholesterol, replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats (like cooking with



vegetable oil instead of butter), and avoiding sweetened beverages.

In addition to eating a heart-healthy diet, being physically active is also key to promoting heart health. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. These guidelines also recommend doing muscle-



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strengthening activities on at least two days per week. However, if this is more than you can do right now, focus on doing what you can. Even just five minutes of physical activity can have health benefits!

There are many tools out there which can help you to make healthy choices regarding diet and exercise, including MyPlate, the Nutrition Facts label, and more. Learning how to use these tools to improve your health and potentially reduce your health care costs will be the focus of a free class I am teaching at the LaHarpe City Hall on Saturday, February 26th at 1 PM. For more information about this class and other steps you can take to prevent heart disease, please contact me at [clarawicoff@ksu.edu](mailto:clarawicoff@ksu.edu) or 620-365-2242.