Heart Matters

February is heart awareness month. And as you may or may not know, heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), every year, 1 in 4 deaths are caused by heart disease.

Heart disease is also referred to as cardiovascular disease. This is a disease of the heart and blood vessels which cause many problems especially to the walls of the arteries. Plaque builds up along the walls of the arteries restricting blood flow, a condition called atherosclerosis. This also increases the propensity for blood to clot and block flow altogether which can cause a heart attack or stroke. Other forms of heart disease are congestive heart failure, arrhythmia and heart valve problems.

CDC statistics state that nearly half of all Americans have at least one major risk factor. Interestingly, many people do not know it, and others are slow to act upon warning signs. It is important to review the risk factors and check in, with yourself and your doctor, to see where you are on the heart disease risk/prevention scale.

NATIONAL WEAR RED DAY this FRIDAY Feb 5

By wearing red, we help raise awareness of cardiovascular disease and provide an important reminder that it is never too early to take action to protect our health.

Risk Factors for Heart Disease

Age: About 85% of people who die from heart disease are over the age of 65. The risks for coronary artery disease increase with age.

Gender: Men have a greater risk for coronary artery disease and are more likely to have heart attacks earlier in life than women. However, women’s risk for heart disease increases after menopause.

Family History and Genetic Factors: Heart disease tends to run in families. People whose parents or siblings developed heart disease at a younger age are more likely to develop it themselves. Certain genetic factors/conditions may increase the likelihood of developing heart disease, such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Tobacco Use: Smoking can lead to atherosclerosis by damaging blood vessels and the heart leading to a heart attack. Nicotine can cause blood pressure to rise and the amount of oxygen that our blood can carry is reduced significantly due to carbon monoxide.

Alcohol: Heavy drinking harms the heart by elevating blood pressure levels and increasing triglyceride levels, potentially hardening the arteries.
**Risk Factors Continued....**

*Diet.* Diet plays an important role in the health of the heart. Diets high in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol have been linked to heart disease and other heart related conditions. Excess salt intake can contribute to high blood pressure as well.

*Physical Inactivity.* People who are sedentary are almost twice as likely to develop heart disease as are people who exercise regularly because physical inactivity can lead to medical conditions that are risk factors such as obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.

**Diagnosis**

Heart disease can be diagnosed through a battery of tests. The choice of which (and how many) tests to perform depends on the patient's risk factors, history of heart problems, and current symptoms. Usually the tests begin with the simplest and may progress to more complicated ones. Many people do not experience symptoms, which is why this disease is called “the silent killer”. Routine check-ups with your physician are important, especially if you are at risk for heart disease.

**Prevention**

Yes, there is good news! Heart disease can often be prevented when people make healthy choices and manage their health conditions.

*Stop smoking:* Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease, especially atherosclerosis. Quitting is the best way to reduce your risk of heart disease and its complications.

*Check your cholesterol:* Ask your doctor for a baseline cholesterol test when you're in your 20s and then at least every five years, according to the CDC. You may need to start testing earlier if high cholesterol is in your family. Desirable LDL level is below 130 mg/dL, or 3.4 mmol/L. If you have other risk factors for heart disease, you should aim for an LDL below 100 mg/dL (2.6 mmol/L). If you're at very high risk of heart disease — if you've already had a heart attack or have diabetes, for example — aim for an even lower LDL level — below 70 mg/dL (1.8 mmol/L).

*Maintain a healthy weight:* Being overweight increases your risk of heart disease. A BMI of less than 25 and a waist circumference of 35 inches (88.9 centimeters) or less is the goal for preventing and treating heart disease.

*Manage stress:* Reduce stress as much as possible. Practice techniques for managing stress, such as meditation, muscle relaxation and deep breathing. Exercise is another great tool to reduce stress.

*Deal with depression:* Being depressed can increase your risk of heart disease significantly. All the techniques for managing stress can also help deal with depression.

*Control your blood pressure:* The CDC recommends routine blood pressure measurement (at least every two years). If blood pressure is higher than normal on several occasions or if there is a history of heart disease, more frequent measurements may be needed. Optimal blood pressure is less than 120 systolic and 80 diastolic, as measured in millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

*Physical Activity:* Exercise helps achieve and maintain a healthy weight and control all risk factors for heart disease (diabetes, elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure and stress). Individuals who are healthy should do a minimum of 30 - 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week.
Prevention Continued....

Even low amounts of moderate or high intensity exercise can help produce beneficial changes in cholesterol and lipid levels. However, more prolonged exercise is required to significantly change cholesterol levels, notably by increasing HDL ("good cholesterol"). Resistance (weight) training has also been associated with heart protection (CDC Physical Activity Site).

**Manage Diabetes:** If you have diabetes, tight blood sugar control can help reduce the risk of heart disease. Certain lifestyle changes may have to be initiated in order to help control sugar levels.

**Healthy diet:** A diet based on whole foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains is key to reducing the risk of heart disease and other medical conditions that can lead to heart disease. Below are some good options:

- Good whole grain choices include whole wheat, oats/oatmeal, rye, barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, and quinoa.
- The CDC recommends limiting daily intake of saturated fat (found mostly in animal products) to 10% of calories per day and 1% of calories per day of trans fat (found in hydrogenated fats, commercially baked products, and many fast foods). Choose lean meats and vegetable alternatives (such as soy). Select low-fat dairy products. Grill, bake, or broil fish, meat, and skinless poultry.
- Oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines are rich in the omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Consumption of these fatty acids is linked to reduced risk of sudden death and death from coronary artery disease. Consume at least 8 ounces of fish twice a week, especially oily fish. People with existing heart disease should consider taking daily fish oil supplements of 850 - 1,000 mg eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DPA).
- Use little or no sodium (salt) in your foods. Use alternative seasonings and/or herbs to add flavor to meals.
- Consuming less than 10% of calories per day on beverages and foods that contain added sugars (such as corn syrups, sucrose, glucose, fructose, maltrose, dextrose, concentrated fruit juice, and honey) is recommended by the CDC.
- Moderate alcohol consumption (one or two drinks a day; 5 ounces wine, 12 ounces beer, or 1.5 ounces hard liquor is one drink) can help boost HDL “good” cholesterol levels. Moderate amounts of alcohol may also prevent blood clots and inflammation.
There are so many resources out there but it is up to us to be proactive. Here are just a few credible sites for additional information:

- National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
- American Heart Association
- American College of Cardiology
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Heart Health Recipes

Sautéed and grilled salmon are one of my favorite meals to make. It is a quick and easy meal to prepare any evening of the week.

**Sautéed Salmon**

**Ingredients:**
- 6 oz Salmon Fillet
- ¼ tsp Turmeric
- ¼ - ½ tsp Fennel
- Pinch Pepper
- 1 tsp Honey

**Instructions:**
Sprinkle both sides of the salmon with turmeric, fennel and pepper. Preheat a non-stick frying pan on medium heat, lightly coat with spray and place the fillet in the pan. Cook until lightly browned (3-4 minutes) and then gently flip. Drizzle the honey in the pan. Cook until second side is lightly browned and serve (1 serving). *Recipe by PN Gourmet Nutrition*

A nice complement with the grilled salmon this winter season is a hearty green and grain salad.

**Quinoa, Kale, Cranberry, Walnut and Butternut Squash Salad**

**Ingredients (salad):**
- 1 ½ cups Quinoa
- 3 cups Water
- 2 tbsp Olive Oil
- 1 Red Onion, diced
- 2 Garlic Cloves, minced
- 1 ½ cups Butternut Squash, peeled & cut into ¼-inch dice

Mrs. Dash or other No Salt Substitute to taste

**Ingredients (dressing):**
- 1 Garlic Clove, minced
- 1 tbsp Balsamic Vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon Mustard
- 1 tsp Low or non-sugar Raspberry Jam
- ¼ cup Olive Oil

Mrs. Dash or other No Salt Substitute to taste

- 1 ½ cups Kale, cut into ½ inch ribbons
- ½ cup Dried Cranberries
- ½ cup Walnuts, chopped

**Instructions:**
Cook quinoa according to package. While quinoa is cooking, heat olive oil in a large skillet, add onion and cook until translucent. Add the garlic and squash. Cover and cook for about 10 minutes until the squash is tender. Season to taste. Let cool to room temperature.

Whisk all dressing ingredients in a small bowl. Gently fold the cooked vegetables, quinoa and kale together with dressing, dried cranberries, and walnuts. Serve and enjoy (6 to 8 servings) *Recipe by Rachel J. Weston*

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