

## **Living Well and Recognizing American Heart Month**

Cardiovascular diseases, including stroke, are our nation's No. 1 killer. To urge Americans to join the battle against these diseases, since 1963, Congress has required the president to proclaim February "American Heart Month." Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. It affects men and women of every age and race. During American Heart Month, we encourage all Americans to join the fight against heart disease and to learn more about how to prevent it. During American Heart Month, all Americans are urged to learn more about heart health and to reduce their risk factors for serious heart conditions. By making healthy choices, we can live longer and better lives.

Keeping your heart healthy is important! According to the American Heart Association, heart disease is the number one cause of death in the United States. But by following some simple tips, you can help keep your heart happy and healthy. Get plenty of exercise. Thirty minutes of moderate exercise a day is a good rule of thumb, but you can challenge yourself with 15 to 20 minutes of more intense activity 3 days a week. Remember, exercise should be fun; do things that you enjoy and you'll be more likely to stick with it! Eat a variety of foods. A healthy diet includes grain products, vegetables, fruits, low-fat milk products, lean meats, fish, poultry, and dry beans. Choose fewer foods that are high in fat or sugar. Avoid foods high in cholesterol, since they can clog your arteries and make it harder for your heart to pump blood through them. Don't smoke. Besides harming your heart, smoking can lead to cancer, a weakened immune system, emphysema, and a lot of other problems. Avoid alcohol. Drinking alcohol could cause your blood pressure to rise, increase your heart rate, and cause your heart to beat abnormally.

This month take some action to be aware of your heart health. Have your blood pressure checked even if you feel fine. Also try having a blood test for cholesterol and lipids. When you visit your doctor, try talking with him or her about heart disease and your personal risk. This month, do at least one thing to decrease your risk like going for a walk or reducing your daily sugar intake by cutting a soft drink per day. Try checking out the local classes for nutrition, exercise, and stopping smoking. If you find it tough to strike out on these adventures alone, look to friends and family for support. Encourage them to make a healthy life change by gaining their support for your own lifestyle changes.

Taking care of your heart is like taking care of the motor in your car. You can change the tires, wash the outside, and even replace parts, but without the motor, it just won't run. Think of your heart as your life force, without it you won't be going anywhere. So take action in February to keep your life force running and obtain a healthy heart.