

HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital Provides Healthy Eating And Exercise Tips During American Heart Month

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O'FALLON — While there are some health risks that you may not have control over when it comes to heart disease, such as your family history, there are factors that you can positively affect to reduce your risk. Two main factors that you can affect are maintaining a healthy diet and incorporating exercise into your lifestyle.

Are you eating the right foods? Integrating moderate to vigorous exercise in your daily life? Although you might know eating certain foods and a sedentary lifestyle can increase your risk of heart disease, it's often tough to change your habits.

During American Heart Month – a month dedicated to raising awareness about the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States – HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital and Prairie Heart Institute are committed to educating the public on how to lead a healthier lifestyle and keep hearts healthy.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States; one in every four deaths is from heart disease and stroke. These conditions are also leading causes of disabilities which prevent people from working and enjoying family activities. However, changes in eating habits and adding in exercise can prevent or fight back against heart disease.

“Heart disease symptoms can vary widely, and sometimes heart disease is undetected until someone experiences a catastrophic event such as a heart attack or unexpected death,” said Dr. Scott Marrus, Prairie Heart Institute cardiologist. “That's why we stress taking preventive measures, healthy changes you can make to lower your risk of developing heart disease. For those who already have heart disease, controlling and preventing [risk factors](#) is also important for them to slow the progress of the disease.”

Healthy Eating

Knowing which foods to eat more of and which foods to limit can start you on your way to a heart healthy diet. Below are a few tips:

- Limit unhealthy fats and cholesterol. Limiting saturated and trans fats is the most important step you can take to reduce your blood cholesterol and lower your risk of coronary artery disease. A high blood cholesterol level can lead to a buildup of plaque in your arteries, which can increase your risk of heart attack and stroke.
- Choose low-fat protein sources. Lean meat, poultry and fish, low-fat dairy products and egg whites are some of your best sources of protein. Beans and peas also are good sources of protein.
- Eat more vegetables and fruits. Vegetables and fruits are good sources of vitamins and minerals. They are low in calories and rich in dietary fiber. Vegetables and fruits also contain substances found in plants that may help prevent cardiovascular disease.

- Select whole grains. Whole grains are good sources of fiber and other nutrients that play a role in regulating blood pressure and heart health. You can increase the amount of whole grains in a heart-healthy diet by making simple substitutions for refined grain products.
- Reduce the sodium (salt) in your food. Eating a lot of sodium (salt) can contribute to high blood pressure, a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Reducing sodium is an important part of a heart-healthy diet.

A broad range of heart-healthy recipes are available online at prairieheart.org/recipes.

Activity and Exercise

According to the American Heart Association, a healthy level of exercise for adults is at least 150 minutes per week (about 20 minutes a day) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week (about 10 minutes a day) of vigorous aerobic activity or a combination of both, preferably spread throughout the week. Any physical movement is good and burns calories, but aerobic or “cardio” activity gets your heart rate up and benefits your heart.

If you have a chronic condition or disability, talk with your health care provider about what types and amounts of physical activity are right for you before making too many changes. But if you have a relatively sedentary lifestyle, here are some simple ways to incorporate activity into your day to improve your heart health:

- Go for a walk. The simplest way to get moving and improve your health is to start walking. It's free, easy and can be done just about anywhere. Even walking in place can help.
- Take the stairs. While the elevator may be easy to climb floors, it doesn't make your heart rate climb. Take the stairs when you can, even if just a floor or two. And don't just ride the escalator – climb it to increase your activity.
- Add movement to your workday. If you have lots of phone calls on your cellphone throughout your day, try walking and talking, even if it's just marching in place. If you sit at a desk, make a habit of standing up or moving every time you make or answer a phone call.
- Stand rather than sit at work. Explore your options for using a standing desk or sit-stand desk riser. Try alternating sitting and standing throughout the day, while also taking walking and stretching breaks.

To learn more, visit heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness.