

WELLNESS BEAT

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February is National Heart Month. Make this year the year that you take control of your life and health. Don't make it harder than it has to be. A few simple changes in your lifestyle can greatly reduce your risk factors associated with heart disease and improve your overall health.

Heart disease is the number one killer in the nation, affecting both men and women. Often times, heart disease prevails itself in coronary heart disease, usually in the form of a heart attack. CDC reports indicate that a coronary event occurs every 25 seconds in America, with one of those cases resulting in a fatality every minute.

Would you know the symptoms of a heart attack if you were faced with one? Most people know that if a person clutches his or her chest and falls to the ground it could be a heart attack, but did you know there are other subtle symptoms that aren't quite as obvious? Symptoms of a heart attack, especially in women, can be much different than just simple pain or pressure on the chest. Some of the subtle symptoms of a heart attack include: unusual shortness of breath with or without chest pain; unusual fatigue or weakness; sweating, nausea, or vomiting; and pain that radiates in other areas of the body such as your arm, neck, jaw, shoulders, or upper back.

Since these symptoms can be hard to detect as something different from the common flu or stress, it is always important to know the risk factors associated with heart disease. Start by looking at your lifestyle. If you have a poor diet, are sedentary, smoke, or drink excessively, you are automatically at a greater risk of developing cardiovascular diseases. If you are a woman and your waistline is greater than 35 inches, start making changes today! The fat around your waistline is a different fat than that stored in other areas of the body. "Waistline fat" releases a different type of chemical into the body that increases your blood pressure and cholesterol levels. By reducing your waistline by even a fraction of an inch, you can dramatically improve your cardiovascular health.

There are other simple changes you can make to reduce your chances of developing heart disease. Start by moving. By participating in moderate intensity physical activity (walking) 30 minutes a day, you can greatly improve your heart health. If necessary, start with small bouts of exercising for 10 minutes, three times a day. Look at your diet. Try controlling your portion sizes and eat more fruits and vegetables. Choose foods that are made with whole grains. At least half of the carbohydrates you consume each day should come from whole grains. And finally, laugh! Life is too short to take too seriously so laugh out loud every day. It is estimated that 15 minutes of laughter is equal to 30 minutes of activity when it comes to heart health.