

## Heart of the matter

Reduce risk factors for heart disease by maintaining a healthier lifestyle

With Valentine's Day just around the corner and heart-shaped chocolates lining the store shelves, it's no surprise that February is Heart Awareness Month. But that means it's time to take care of your heart - not to polish off those chocolate hearts.

Heart disease is the leading killer of Americans today. In fact, it accounts for about 500,000 deaths every year. And women are no exception. Heart disease is also the number one killer of women every year, believe it or not. These statistics are astonishing, especially given the fact that most cases of heart disease are preventable or at least postponable.

You can start reducing your risk factors for heart disease today by changing your lifestyle. The first thing you can do is to eat a nutritious, low-fat diet. That may sound easy if you're used to donuts while on the go for breakfast, fast food for lunch, and pizza for dinner while watching television. But actually there are dozens of ways to improve your diet through healthier substitutions.

For starters, trade in that donut for a whole-grain bagel or cereal in the morning. Pack a sandwich for lunch with low-fat dressing and a piece of fruit to fill you up. Opt for a quick pasta dish for dinner if you don't have time to prepare for something more involved. The key is to keep your total fat intake to less than 30 percent of calories.

In order to reduce your fat intake, you have to make smart choices as well as read food labels. Fat is found in animal products which include meat, poultry, and dairy, so use these sparingly as side dishes instead of the main focus of your meals. Beware especially of saturated fat, which is the biggest problem in American diets. Saturated fats should make up no more than 8-10 percent of your daily calories.

You don't have to radically change your diet all at once. If it seems too overwhelming begin by reducing the fat content of one meal a day. Substitute lower fat versions of the same foods at that meal or alternate the days you allow yourself to eat certain foods. If you do much too fast, such as completely cutting out cheese or red meat, you may feel deprived and rebound by eating more and giving up healthier eating habits altogether.

The key is moderation. Eat a variety of healthy foods in smaller portions including fruits, vegetables, legumes, pasta, grains, and yes, even low-fat meats and dairy products. Your body needs a healthy balance of food for fuel. To keep the fat content under control.

A high blood cholesterol level is another major risk factor for coronary heart disease. Cholesterol and fat go hand-in-hand in many foods so reducing your fat intake can reduce your cholesterol count. Aim for a cholesterol rating of 200 or below. You can get a simple test done at your doctor's office. Cholesterol intake should be less than 300 milligrams per day. Don't be fooled by food labels that say "no cholesterol." Some of these products may not actually contain cholesterol, but they can be high in saturated fat which raises your cholesterol level.

The American Heart Association also recommends limiting sodium intake to no more than 2400 mg a day. Use herbs and spices as seasoning instead of salt and pay close attention to packaged foods. The sodium in one can of a packaged soup almost as much as a person should consume in a whole day! Also, many cheeses are high in sodium as are meats or fish that are "smoked."

Along with healthy eating habits, an active lifestyle can decrease your risk factors for heart disease. Recent study has shown how exercise protects against coronary heart disease. Physical activity can release tension, help control your weight, reduce blood cholesterol levels, lower your blood pressure and encourage other healthy lifestyle changes such as more nutritious eating habits.

Participating in any amount of exercise if you have not been physically active can be an asset to your heart. But ideally, you should try to do 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity (preferably aerobic) three to four times per week in order to help your heart, according to the American Heart Association. Be sure to check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program if you are over 40, haven't exercised in recent years, or if you know you are already at risk for heart disease.

Healthy eating and regular exercise are extremely important for your heart but not smoking is equally as important. According to the American Heart Association, cigarette smoking more than doubles your chances of having a heart attack and is the leading cause of sudden cardiac death.

If you smoke - even just a few cigarettes a day - quitting could save your life. Once you've quit, your risk of heart disease will quickly be reduced. Plus, you may save the life of a non-smoker who lives with you. Believe it or not, more than 35,000 non-smokers die of heart disease in America each year as a result of long-term, second-hand smoke inhalation.

Changing your habits toward a healthier lifestyle automatically decrease your risk for developing heart disease. Every small step forward, whether it's taking a short walk instead of watching TV or eating or low-fat yogurt instead of ice cream, starts you on your way to a healthier heart.

The best Valentine's Day gift you can give yourself and your loved ones is a healthy lifestyle. You're worth it! I send every one of your letters and I love your comments. Please keep writing me with any questions, inspirational stories or suggestions for upcoming articles to: "Talk to the Mirror," Weight Watchers Corporate Communications, P.O. Box 9072, Farmington Hills, MI 48334-2974, or fax (248) 553-7106.

(Florine Mark is an appointee to the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Michigan Fitness Foundation.)

### HEALTH FOCUS

In an attempt to urge Americans to join the battle against heart disease, the U.S. Congress since 1988 has mandated that the sitting president issue a proclamation designating February as American Heart Month. The American Heart Association will be busy this month raising funds and providing educational information about cardiovascular diseases and stroke. This week, in addition, represents Heart Awareness Week for educators in Metropolitan Detroit. For information regarding American Heart Month activities in your area, contact your nearest AHA, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or go online at <http://www.americanheart.org>.

Florine Mark, President and CEO of The W W Group, Inc., the largest franchise of Weight Watchers International, and Dr. Keith Levick, a health psychologist and the director of The Center for Childhood Weight Management in Farmington Hills, are staunch supporters of this movement and recently combined their efforts to discuss the importance of motivation, commitment and attitude as it applies to a healthy lifestyle.

Levick: Once again Florine, we have the opportunity to send out a joint message. Between television, radio and the newspaper, we often "sing from the same page." Considering this week is Heart Awareness Week in the tri-county area sponsored by the American Heart Association - and by judging from our columns - important information must be conveyed.

Our focus is cardiovascular risk factors, which apply to both children and adults. The behaviors we have chosen can make the difference in our overall health, and getting us to modify our lifestyles can be a real challenge. With that in mind, Florine, what do you think is a key factor in helping people change their behaviors?

Mark: The most important factor is keeping yourself motivated and having the right attitude. Personally, I think back to how awful I felt when I was 50 pounds overweight and how terrific I feel today - energetic and healthy with a positive attitude. My daily motivation comes from knowing that by living a healthy lifestyle I will be able to enjoy time with my grandchildren and great-grandchildren now and in the years to come. What have you found?

Levick: You're right, Florine. Having the right attitude is a key factor in maintaining motivation. We are not born motivated; it's a state of mind created and nurtured by each person. Once motivated we need to keep strengthening the positive aspects of the given task, such as losing weight. Surely we both have been motivated to maintain our weight loss for as long as we have, well over 20 years. Florine,

from all your years of experience have you been able to identify the characteristics of people who possess the right attitude?

Mark: Although motivation is different for different people, a strong conviction and belief in yourself are important factors. But you really have to be ready to make a change. You have to want to do it for yourself and not for any other reason. A significant event sometimes causes this change in people. This event could be as serious as a heart attack, or watching a video of yourself in bathing suit may do the trick. After nearly overdosing on diet pills, I knew I had to change. My doctor said if I took another pill he couldn't be responsible for what happened to me. From a psychological standpoint, what have you found causes this readiness to change?

Levick: People who want to change a behavior typically cycle through several stages before reaching their goals. Let's use a person wanting to lose weight as an example.

■ First stage: Think about losing weight.

■ Second stage: Development of a stronger awareness to the problems of being overweight and evaluation of the pros and cons.

■ Third stage: Preparation to lose weight by making small behavioral changes. Decreasing the amount of food intake, for example.

■ Fourth stage: Taking some form of action to lose weight, like joining Weight Watchers.

■ Fifth stage: He or she decides to quit after experiencing some frustrations and lapses.

People typically vacillate through these stages in attempting to set goals and plans. Success often rests in the type of support they receive. Do you find this to be true?

Mark: Absolutely. After you have made the commitment, support systems are such an important factor in your success. Family, friends, group leaders, co-workers - all the continuing support of all the people in your life is so important for long-term success.

Levick: So that's why so many people find success through your program - you promote and offer a great deal of support. The same holds true with the children losing weight in my program. The more the parents are involved, the more success the child experiences. Florine, are there any other recommendations you can offer the readers?

Mark: Reward yourself for small successes and don't beat yourself up for small failures. Isn't it amazing how often people beat themselves up when they're not successful right off the bat?

Levick: Changing behavior can be very challenging. Normal lapses will occur. Expect them, prepare for them, and don't label them as failures. Any final suggestions?

Mark: Initially, lose weight completely in the mirror and sincerely ask yourself, "Am I ready to take care of my health?" And then talk to the mirror every day and reinforce it.

Levick: And be ready to make a long-term commitment. Remember that motivation is only the beginning. Lifestyle habits are what keep you going!

#### Healthy Living spotlights Oakland County-related health and medical news and information.

To submit information, write: Healthy Living, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham MI, 48009. Or fax: (248) 644-1314.

#### ADULT RESPIRE PROGRAM

Senex, a City of Farmington Hills-sponsored program for older adults, currently has openings. The Senex program, open Monday through Friday from 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m., is a home-away-from-home with two main goals. One is to give the homebound socialization, some extra care and a variety of activities. The second goal is to enable caregivers some respite from their responsibilities, freeing them to attend to their own needs. For more information, contact Senex Coordinator April Ayers at (248) 473-1830. The Senex program is located within the William Costick Activities Center, 26600 11 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

#### EVALUATING HEALTHCARE

How can you verify the statements made in advertisements for health care products and services? Where can you learn more about the credentials and qualifications of the



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL HANSEN

Food for thought: Dr. Keith Levick, director of The Center for Childhood Weight Management in Farmington Hills, stresses to children the importance of a healthy diet.

Educating our children is vital in prevention of heart disease

As you read Florine Mark's column, you may wonder about the risks of not following her advice. Preventing heart disease begins with educating our children.

When appropriate health behaviors are taught at home, in school and in the community, children will be equipped with the necessary skills to defend against the nation's number one killer.

A causal relationship exists between a child's health and an adult's health.

Results from the Bogalusa Heart Study, a comprehensive study that tracked 5,000 children in Bogalusa, La., over 12 years, revealed among other things that cardiovascular risk factors (behaviors that contribute to heart disease) have origins in childhood. Specifically, fat deposits were found in the aortas of the three-year-olds and in the coronary arteries of teenagers.

To better understand the severity of cardiovascular disease in children, let's examine three important risk factors.

#### Nutritional and Weight Problems

Child obesity is now recognized as a serious disease, affecting 25 percent of American children. The immediate and potential risks are both physically and psychologically damaging. The reasons childhood obesity exist are numerous - consumption of high-fat foods; decline of exercise; parents' limited knowledge of nutrition; and the changing American family represent some of them.

Many of our children are also developing dysfunctional eating behaviors that lead to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Learning to eat healthily is critical to our children's physical and psychological well-being as the following statistics reveal:

■ One out of four American children is obese.

■ From 1965-80, obesity rose 54 percent in children from 6-11 years of age and 39 percent for children 12-17 years old.

■ Eating disorders are the third most common chronic illness among adolescent girls.

■ One out of 10 teenagers has a clinical eating disorder.

■ Six percent of people with eating disorders die each year.

#### Exercise

The merits of exercise are overwhelming. Exercise is tied to body shape, weight control and mental health. New studies have linked the role of exercise to certain medical conditions. A recent investigation examining 13,000 men and women over an eight-year period concluded that inactivity is now considered to be a cardiovascular risk factor. Just as obesity and smoking contribute to the risk of heart disease, so does the lack of exercise.

An inactive woman's chance of dying increases 4.6 percent compared to active women. Furthermore, an inactive man's chance increases 6.5 percent compared to an active man.

Helping our children develop good exercise habits prepares them for a healthy adult life. Unfortunately, 75 percent of schools in the United States either terminated the physical education teachers or reassigned them to other classes. Consequently, a child may receive only one or two physical education classes a week, and it then becomes the parents' responsibility to teach and reinforce these healthy behaviors. Again, the sad statistics speak for themselves.

■ Approximately 50 percent of children do not engage in regular physical activity.

■ Only 25 percent of high school girls and 50 percent of boys participate in vigorous exercise.

■ Only 19 percent of girls attend physical education classes on a regular basis.

■ Less than 12 percent of parents (either one) spend one hour a week engaged in some form of recreational activity with their child.

#### Smoking

If you are or were a smoker, think about when you began. It was probably a teenager. Every day approximately 3,000 young people become smokers. In fact, 75 percent of adult smokers started before age 18 and 90 percent began before age 21.

Let's protect our children from this terrible addiction. Children must have the right to breathe unpolluted air from a pair of clean lungs.

Identifiable risk factors such as smoking, obesity, and a lack of exercise are clearly associated with heart disease. And since these behaviors can be modified, heart disease can be prevented. It begins in the home with parents as role models and by teaching children healthy behaviors. Keep in mind, a parent's lifestyle often becomes a road map of a child's life.

(Dr. Keith Levick is a health psychologist and the director of The Center for Childhood Weight Management in Farmington Hills. You can reach him at 248-661-6625 or send him an e-mail at [klewick@aol.com](mailto:klewick@aol.com).)

### HEALTHY LIVING



individuals providing the products and services?

Residents of southeastern Michigan have access to a variety of resources, according to Peggynow Nowak, M.D., president of the Oakland County Medical Society, a non-profit organization of 1,700 physicians.

"In response to an increase in requests for such information, our Medical/Legal Committee researched the issue and compiled tips to help those who want to find out more," Nowak said. "Our fact sheet tells you how to get the information necessary to make a wise decision before spending your money." For a copy of the fact sheet call the OCMS at 248-646-0400 or send a SASE to: OCMS, 346 Park Street, Birmingham MI, 48009.

For more information regarding the disorder or the new support group, contact Judith Reed Liskys at (248) 541-1470, call the National Marfan Foundation at 1-800-8-MARFAN, or come to the support group meeting.

busy schedule allows. Contact the ACS's Volunteerism Department at (248) 557-5353 ext. 335 to find out how you can be a member of the American Cancer Society Team.

**MARFAN SYNDROME**

A start-up meeting for a new Marfan Syndrome Support Group is scheduled for noon Saturday, Feb. 14. The Royal Oak Public Library Auditorium (222 E. 11 Mile Road) will be the site. This group will give people with Marfan Syndrome, a connective tissue disorder that may be inherited or caused by a spontaneous genetic mutation, and their families an opportunity to meet others who have learned to live with the disorder.

February is also Marfan Syndrome Awareness Month. For more information regarding the disorder or the new support group, contact Judith Reed Liskys at (248) 541-1470, call the National Marfan Foundation at 1-800-8-MARFAN, or come to the support group meeting.