FEBRUARY IS

HEART HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

Focusing on your heart health has never been more important.

- **Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States.** But you can do a lot to protect your heart.

- **Self-care is heart-health care.** Practicing self-care can keep our hearts healthy. Being physically active, eating healthier foods, getting enough sleep, not smoking, and finding healthy ways to reduce stress can help prevent heart disease. And, when we take care of our hearts, we set an example for those around us to do the same.

- **Get to know #OurHearts!** Learn what a healthy blood pressure, cholesterol, weight, and blood sugar level is for you and how they impact your risk for heart disease. Having a basic understanding of information that concerns your health and using the information to inform health-related decisions and actions for yourself and others, is strongly linked to better health.

Take Action Towards Better Heart Health

Increase Physical Activity:

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. The good news is you can lower many heart disease risk factors such as "bad" LDL cholesterol levels, increase "good" HDL cholesterol levels, and manage high blood pressure by simply moving more. Being active can also improve blood flow and give you more stamina and ability to cope with stress.

If you're inactive, you're nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease than if you're active so for major health benefits **aim for at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) each week.** To ensure you're reducing your sitting throughout the day and getting active, try breaking your activity up. Do 10 minutes of exercise, 3 times a day or one 30-minute session on five separate days each week. Any amount of physical activity is better than none and all activity counts! Exercising with a friend, family, or co-worker makes sticking to being physically active easier.

Try these activities:

- Take a yoga or fitness class with a friend. You can even take a virtual class online with a friend in another city.

- Work on your fitness goals with your spouse or roommate.

- Go for a daily walk with a neighbor.

Eat a Heart-Healthy Diet

A healthy diet that is low in sodium and saturated fat is key to heart disease prevention. Try the highly rated Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan.

It recommends:

- Eating vegetables, fruits, and whole grains

- Eating fish, poultry, beans, nuts, vegetable oils, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products

- Limiting foods that are high in saturated fat and sodium

- Limiting sugar and other sweeteners. Sticking to your healthy eating goals is easier when you enlist the help of a friend or family member to keep you motivated.

Going out to eat or ordering takeout? Here's some tips:

- Nix the all-you-can-eat meals, where people tend to overeat.

- Split a meal with a friend or family member.

- If you get fast food, pick a salad over fries and don't order bigger versions of a sandwich.

- Bring a salad or veggie side dish to your next potluck, so you'll have something healthy to fill up on.

Studies suggest that we tend to eat like our friends and family. Your healthy choices may inspire those around you.

Get Quality Sleep and Reduce Stress

Stress can contribute to high blood pressure and other heart risks. Not getting enough sleep or regularly getting poor quality sleep increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, and other medical conditions. Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night.

You don't have to work on improving your sleep and reducing stress alone. Here's some ideas to keep you motivated with the help of others:

- Practicing meditation, being more physically active, doing relaxation therapy, and talking with someone you trust can help you cope with stress and sleep better.

- Find a friend or family member who shares your goals. Together, take steps to lower your stress and follow healthy sleep practices, like having a regular bedtime and not eating late at night.

Stop Smoking

The chemicals in tobacco smoke harm your heart and blood vessels in many ways. Talk to your doctor if you vape. There is scientific evidence that flavorings found in vaping products can damage your heart and lungs.

Quitting is hard, but many people have succeeded, and you can too.

Ask your family and friends for support in your effort.

· Set a quit date and let those close to you know about it.

· To keep your hands busy and be with others when you get urges to smoke, consider joining a group that focuses on sewing, knitting, woodworking, or other such activities.

· If you have trouble quitting smoking on your own, consider joining a support group. Many hospitals, workplaces, and community groups offer classes to help people quit smoking.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Being overweight is hard on your heart. It increases your risk of having heart disease, a stroke, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Choosing heart-healthy foods and getting regular exercise will help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Also, find ways to reduce stress, which affects energy and hunger and, if chronic, can make your body store more fat.

If your doctor diagnosed you with overweight or obesity, it's important to follow their recommendations for losing weight. Health professionals recommend losing 5% to 10% of your initial weight over the course of about 6 months. But a loss of just 3% to 5% of your current weight can lower triglycerides and glucose levels in your blood, as well as your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Losing more than 3% to 5% of your weight can improve blood pressure readings, lower "bad" LDL cholesterol, and increase "good" HDL cholesterol.

If you need to lose weight, connecting with others can help keep you on track. Try these:

- Join a weight loss program with a buddy.

- Sign "social support" agreements with three family members or friends.

- Get your kids involved. Explain that it's important to sit less and move more to stay at a healthy weight and that they'll have more energy to ride a bike or shoot hoops. Tell them you'll do the same.

Heart Healthy Chicken Parmesan

Ingredients

- 2 tsp olive oil
- 1/2 onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1/2 cup tomato sauce
- 1 tsp chopped fresh basil
- Black pepper to taste
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1/4 cup whole wheat Italian bread crumbs
- 4 boneless skinless chicken breasts (4 oz each), pounded
- 1/2 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese
- 2 Tbsp grated Parmesan cheese

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Lightly coat a baking sheet with nonstick cooking spray.
2. In a small saucepan, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and sauté for 2 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté for 30 seconds. Add the tomato sauce, basil and pepper. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.
3. Place egg and bread crumbs in separate shallow bowls. Dip chicken breasts into egg and then dredge in bread crumbs.
4. Arrange chicken breasts on baking sheet. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until chicken is cooked through.
5. Spread half of the tomato sauce in a casserole dish. Place baked chicken on tomato sauce and spread remaining sauce over chicken. Sprinkle mozzarella and Parmesan over chicken. Cover with foil.
6. Bake for an additional 3 to 5 minutes, or until cheese is melted.