



February 2007

American Heart Month

Coronary Heart disease is the #1 killer in the United States. Nearly 700,000 Americans die each year from some form of cardiovascular disease.

In February, during American Heart Month, take time to learn about how to keep your heart healthy. And learn the signs and symptoms of heart disease so you can protect yourself and those you love.

The president's HealthierUS initiative has four simple goals to improve your overall health and your heart: exercise daily; develop good eating habits; avoid tobacco, drugs, and excessive alcohol; and take advantage of preventive screenings to detect problems early.

Here are some guidelines to help you reach those goals.

- **Get regular exercise**
Aim for 30 minutes of exercise everyday. Regular exercise helps lower blood pressure, improve blood cholesterol levels, and tone muscles.
- **Eat a balanced diet**
Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, good quality proteins, and heart healthy monounsaturated fats. Limit saturated fats and watch your calories to keep weight under control.
- **Know your risks – then take action**
 - Find out if you have a family history of heart disease. Consult with your doctor to develop a prevention plan.
 - Some illnesses and conditions (like diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity), can place you at higher risk for cardiovascular diseases. Work with your doctor to monitor your health more closely if you are managing a health condition that puts you at higher risk.
- Examine your lifestyle and habits. Are there changes you can make to reduce your risk? By looking at family history (genetics) and lifestyle combined you can get a good idea of your risk for heart disease and exactly what steps you can take to protect yourself.
- **If you use tobacco, quit**
Tobacco use causes heart disease, some forms of cancer, and chronic lung disease. In fact, tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the US today.
- **Get your blood pressure checked regularly**
Uncontrolled high blood pressure can damage both the heart muscle and blood vessels. If you have high blood pressure, work with your doctor to keep it under control.
- **Check your cholesterol regularly**
Get a cholesterol screen at least annually. High blood cholesterol levels can cause a build up of plaque on the lining of the blood vessels, which can eventually block blood vessels. And blocked blood vessels can cause a heart attack.
- **Know the signs and symptoms of heart attack**
Recognizing heart attack symptoms and knowing when to call 9-1-1 are key to getting quick and appropriate care that can help to prevent or limit heart damage.
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and how to use an AED (automated external defibrillator).

Visit the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute (NHLB) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH): http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/HeartAttack/HeartAttack_Signs.html to learn the signs of a heart attack.

Learn more about the HealthierUS initiative at: <http://www.healthierus.gov>.

"There are no shortcuts to any place worth going."

-- Beverly Sills

Don't ignore those Pesky Pecs

Whether you are swinging a racket or raking leaves you need your pectoral muscles to help you. Movements like pushing or pulling benefit from strong chest muscles.

Upper body stability and strength depend on the two chest muscles. The pectoralis major covers the torso from your armpit up to the collarbone. This muscle moves the shoulders. The pectoralis minor moves the shoulder blade and forms a link from the ribs to the scapula.

One of the basic moves for chest strength is the push-up. If you're new to exercise, basic push-ups are great for starters. You can do these at home or anywhere; any time of day. To better isolate those pectorals, use a wide arm position. If your hands are closer, you'll let your triceps do most of the work.

When push-ups become easy, you can add dumbbell or bar exercises such as flat, incline, and decline bench presses, as well as dumbbell or cable flies. Check with the staff at your Wellness/Fitness Center for tips.

When working with weight, try eight to twelve repetitions of each exercise. To avoid injury, use correct form and maintain a steady speed throughout the exercise. And don't use too heavy a weight. With weight training, use repetitions – or reps – to build strength and endurance safely.

Start out with flat bench presses. When performing presses, bring the bar or weights down steadily, controlling the weight the entire time.

Don't try to cheat by using your legs or back. If you lift your legs or arch your back, or if you raise your bum off the bench, you risk back injury.

Next, proceed to the incline bench (or incline machine). Use a 45-degree incline. Your chest routine should include flat and incline bench presses as well as dumbbell or cable flies.

Visit your Wellness/Fitness Center for a fitness assessment and to learn proper form and for tips on other exercise to strengthen your pectorals.

And with any exercise remember:

- Always warm up and stretch before proceeding to strength exercises
- When performing repetitions, it's very important to breathe properly throughout. The key is to exhale on exertion. Do not hold your breath. If you hold your breath, you starve your muscles of needed oxygen they need to carry out the movement. Holding your breath during a lift is especially dangerous to those with high blood pressure as it can increase your blood pressure to dangerous levels.

The nutritious, delicious Apple

A is for apple: an appealing fruit that's attractive, appetizing and available year round.

We use apples to evoke love and patriotism. "You're the apple of my eye," we say, or "as American as apple pie." Turns out another apple adage is true, too: "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." The nutrients and fiber in apples have whole-body health benefits, from better digestion to lower cholesterol.

Apples are a convenient, wash-and-go fruit. Low in calories, apples are nutritious, filling, and they taste great. There's an apple variety for almost every taste.

Not just for snacks, think out of the box, or bushel, when preparing apples.

- Dice them into salads. Top cereals with fresh or dehydrated apples. Add apples to muffins, stuffing, and pancakes. Try them with peanut butter. Baked apples make a naturally sweet and healthy side dish. Bake them whole or quarter them and add to sauces to add a tangy sweetness.
- Lemon juice, or commercially made apple juice with citric acid added, will keep sliced apples white.
- Keep apples crisp in the refrigerator. Apples may look pretty in a bowl, but they'll lose moisture and vitamins.
- Apples come in 7,500 varieties. Gala apples, brought here from New Zealand in the 1970s, and Fuji apples, developed in Japan in the 1930s, are gaining popularity.
- A medium apple -- about 2-3/4 inches in diameter -- contains about 72 calories, 19 grams of carbohydrate and 3 grams of fiber, with no fat or protein.

Want to make relationships Great? Communicate!

Most people agree that “good communication” is key to a good relationship. But what do those two words actually mean?

Good communication is much more than simply setting aside time each day or week to talk – about work, the relationship itself, or about daily happenings. And while this is a good practice, good communication is much more than this.

Good communication requires that each partner really strive for “empathetic understanding.” Empathetic understanding is when you can listen for both meaning and the emotions that underlie the message.

To get to such deep understanding and communication, partners must practice ‘active listening.’ Active listening allows people to really engage in what another person is saying, even when two parties disagree.

What's the best way for two partners to work at communicating better? Here are a few tips:

- To listen actively to what your partner is telling you, do your best to imagine the situation he or she is describing. True listening may take practice. Here's a tip: Can you summarize what you're hearing? Can you pick up on the emotions your partner is feeling?
- Part of active listening, is making sure you avoid the urge to fix your partner's problems with instant solutions. Quite often, you'll find that he or she doesn't really want a "solution"...but only a chance to talk about some strong feelings and experience really being "heard."
- When it's your turn to speak, before you get into your response, take a moment to summarize your understanding of what your partner just told you – to clarify. For example, you can say, “let me see if I understand, it sounds like ...” Then, give them a chance to allow them to respond to your summary – to clarify in case you're a bit off on your understanding.

Life can be stressful, if you and your partner find it difficult to talk intimately because of job stress or the demands of raising kids, make time. It's really important to make an effort to set aside time each week for personal sharing.

Deskercise Corner: **Stretch your pecs**

Chest Stretch

Interlace your fingers behind your back, palms facing in. Raise and straighten your arms, squeezing your shoulder blades together and "opening up" your chest. Hold for five to ten seconds. Repeat five to ten times.